

WITH EYES
OF THE PAST

—
HENRY LADD

WITHDRAWN

31
34
Donated to Ursuline College Library
Cleveland, June 1931

WITH EYES OF THE PAST

AN OUTLINE OF ÆSTHETICS
Edited with Introductory Notes by
Philip N. Youtz



THE WORLD, THE ARTS AND THE
ARTIST

Irwin Edman (Philosophy)

THE JUDGMENT OF LITERATURE
Henry Wells (Literary Criticism)

THE MIRROR OF THE PASSING
WORLD

M. Cecil Allen (Painting)

WITH EYES OF THE PAST
Henry Ladd (Art Criticism)

SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN ÆSTHETICS
Thomas Munro (Psychology and
Æsthetics)

With Eyes of the Past

By

HENRY LADD

*Department of English, Columbia University
Lecturer at The People's Institute*



NEW YORK
W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.

UNIVERSITY OF CLEVELAND LIBRARY
CLEVELAND, OHIO

Copyright, 1928
W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.

701
L 12 W

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vii
CHAPTER	
I. TASTE, PREJUDICE AND PROPRIETY	11
II. THE RATIONAL CONNOISSEUR	19
III. FALSE FACT AND REASONABLE FICTION	42
IV. CREATIVE RESPECTABILITY	56
V. FOR ART'S SAKE	78

9378

INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT cities gradually rise on the slow accumulation of their own dust and débris until through the centuries they build for themselves mounds or low citadels. The streets are imperceptibly elevated until, after a millennium's span, they run many feet above their former level. Later structures are erected above earlier ones. When archæologists excavated the supposed site of the ancient city of Troy, they found seven cities built one above the other. Each layer of rubbish and earth contained the remains of a separate century or two with distinct arts and institutions. Thus in order to gain an understanding of the development and history of an ancient city, it is necessary to dig deep into the dusty foundations which underlie the present level.

A somewhat similar process of accretion takes place in every field of knowledge. For long periods the thought of the world seems to lie dormant when the accumulation of learning is very slow. But such a pause may be followed by a period of tremendous acceleration. At such times, we lose touch with the past upon which our knowledge is built. Material is gathered faster than it can be sorted and the valuable portions extracted for permanent use. We are overwhelmed and buried under the vast store of our own erudition. Threatened with such a distressing fate we call upon the scholar to bring his spade and dig us out from our own dust pile. We require him to excavate and make an inventory of our appalling surplus store.

That such a crisis should threaten in the field of art may seem ironical, for the artist is forever proclaiming not only by voice but also through the creations of his hands that art is perennially new. Though we may recognize that art is a contemporary matter, that every fresh exhibit of painting makes bold excursions into the undiscovered future, nevertheless, for the most part, we view art "with eyes of the past." We look at new pictures from old points of view. The artist

finds that he must speak to a public whose ideas seem to him senile, while the public regards modern art as an outrage or a vulgar attempt at novelty. That the artist should be so out of joint with his world is perhaps the inevitable consequence of a century of vital growth. But that this misunderstanding should be perpetuated longer argues an indifferent and bigoted state of mind.

The times are ripe for probing into our accepted canons of criticism in painting. We need to dig deep into the dust and darkness of the critical tradition and learn in what strata our antiquated beliefs belong. If we happily discover their appropriate century, it may be we will be discreet enough to quietly lay them to rest and adopt new and more appropriate ones with which to face a living art. The fact that Ruskin was a great prose artist and made permanent additions to the art of literature, has served to perpetuate a critical point of view more adapted to his own generation than to ours. His insights have blinded us to his oversights. His none too wise followers have shown little critical ability in discriminating between his wisdom and his prejudices.

Curiously enough, not only is modern art unintelligible to many, but so also is modern criticism which seeks to elucidate the art. Much of the obscurity of contemporary criticism arises from its naïve acceptance of traditional standards. It is composite, ultra-modern in vocabulary, yet full of obsolete notions. To understand its inconsistencies and amusing whims of taste, one must know something of its rather dubious genealogy. The ancestry of English criticism of painting, though an indirect and frequently diluted line, contains the materials necessary for estimating our modern ideas about art.

Books about art are a dangerous form of literature because they are apt to be misused by educated but unintelligent Philistines as a substitute for art itself. Just as the pedant comes to lean on book knowledge instead of venturing to have thoughts of his own, so many readers fancy they are studying art when they are actually studying about art. The function of criticism is partly that of an *hors d'œuvre*, to quicken the appetite for the banquet which follows. Partly, too, criticism is a branch of philosophy existing in its own right. But never is criticism a study which can be put in the place of the study of art itself. For painting is ever the

starting point and test of critical thinking. The philosophy of criticism depends on painting for its verification and vindication.

Yet the book is a by no means wanton guide in the hands of an enlightened person. Looking at pictures yields a certain immediate satisfaction to the senses. We may be content with the mere visual impression. But wherever observation is keen, thought also is aroused. We begin to try to understand as well as see. This second process is akin to the analysis which the artist himself makes. The raw scene from which he contrived his painting has not been crudely reproduced on the canvas. He has given more and also less than a perfect color photograph. What has been the principle of his selection? Why do we enjoy his distortion, or if another word sounds less violent, his emphasis of certain features? What is his theory of perception?

As one discusses these questions with artists, one finds that the answers to many of them have never been consciously formulated. Often the artist seems to know less about what he is doing than any one else. He is content to see freshly and to be a good artisan who can handle his brushes and pigments. For answer to these queries one must go to the critic. In Plato's Symposium, the guests about the table discuss love. It was not Agathon, the poet, or any other worshiper of the fair goddess who knew most about love, but Socrates, the dispassionate philosopher and critic. Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Delacroix, Eugène Fromentin, and a few others have written with rare insight on their art, but few painters have had the power to discuss aught but the technique of painting. The picture itself will satisfy our vision, but to aid us in our thinking we must turn to the book.

Few people would have the taste or indeed the equipment to look into the pedigree of criticism without competent guidance. Yet secretly this is an inquiry about which all of us feel a certain wistful curiosity. We would like to be able to steer and plot our course through galleries and exhibits without danger of shipwreck on the hard reefs of realism or without being engulfed in the high seas of emotionalism. We desire to feel competent to think our own thoughts and to enjoy ourselves without timidity at an exhibition. Moreover,

we have a vague suspicion that a lot that passes for comment on painting is blithering nonsense concealed behind an iridescent screen of rare words and phrases.

The path to independent judgment in the appreciation of painting begins with a knowledge of the best critical thinking of the past, though it does not by any means stop there. With this background and much study of pictures themselves one may soon begin to hold his head erect, daring to praise what is meritorious though perhaps unpopular and to scorn what is cheap and imitative. Such independents are the real allies of the artist. It is their discrimination and intelligence that inspires him to exert his best efforts and it is from them that he receives his most valued approval.

THE PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE,
NEW YORK.

PHILIP N. YOUTZ

WITH EYES OF THE PAST

CHAPTER I

TASTE, PREJUDICE AND PROPRIETY

1

APPRECIATION of art to-day is believed to be a necessary part of culture. The conviction is so universally held that a large part of our educative machinery has been turned to the production of artistic capacity. Periodicals devoted to art have increased their circulation; museums throughout the country have enlarged their endowments and suffered the indignities of publicity for the glory of the cause. Even department stores have exploited the glamour in modern art or the precarious splendor of the antique with, one sees, tangible profit. There has come upon society an enormous will to believe in art which has encouraged a maximum attitude with a minimum learning to evoke enthusiasm and confound taste.

The awe which has thus been generated has reached immeasurable proportions; it has thrown about the fine arts a cloud of mystification, a sentimental and false reverence, which tends to isolate them from their normal province of enjoyment. Even our conscienceless and incomprehensible youth have become seduced into a low seriousness about higher things which enjoys none of the sharp observation, the humor, the liberty that characterize the more real aspects of their shocking young lives. The general disintegration of inherited illusions about life has not cracked the shining faith in art.

This faith, indeed, has for a good many individuals so confused the direction of their natural inclinations as to have very nearly inhibited the possibility of esthetic pleasure. People's heads are filled with memorized judgments about art

which contain no real observation of the art objects themselves. The general enthusiasm combined with a natural vanity has produced a tremendous desire for facile judgment, for sophisticated appreciation, for the correct emotional response to the proper stimulus. The law of specialization which rules the order of our whole social structure, dictates that the word of the expert, the specialist, the man who knows, is the word of God. Who can, for example, enjoy a concert without his program notes? Who can resist the little gilt label under the painting or the statue, the period tag placed with ostentatious modesty near the furniture? What teacher of the arts, or of the appreciation of the arts, has not faced the appalling question, "What do you want me to think about this?" Pleasure more often consists, when one wills to enjoy art, in the knowledge of what one should feel rather than in feeling itself.

The ritual of art appreciation has also begotten a variety of indiscrimination which masks under the name of tolerance. All possible kinds of art crowd the markets and the museums, all possible kinds are exploited: the designs of the king tut period vie with the patterns of the aztecs, the persian with the early american, japanese with contemporary parisian, seventeenth century baroque with greek, pre-raphaelite with medieval chinese. One is scarcely civilized if one is not pleased with the ancients, overwhelmed by the moderns, amused with the "in-betweens." Every period, every style, every new artist has somewhere in the pages of the press a barker; and this is natural, for in a culture that tends to be democratic it is inevitable that all who seem to live well seem to have taste; and it is clear that a desire to justify pretensions will discover for them an authority. But discrimination approaches snobbery; therefore it is wise to like as many things as possible; to claim, in other words, as many authorities as one mind may carry. The result is that the philistine or the low-brow is the only person in the enlightened democracy who is absolved from the suspicion of hypocrisy; his appreciations are spontaneous, his opinions unpretentiously derived from advertisements.

Now this anomalous indiscrimination in esthetic taste exists because of the force and confusion of tradition. The will

to believe in art is itself a fine example of an inherited nineteenth century doctrine. Any one may observe that our environment and our schools are literally crammed with traditions which, through their marriage and strife, produce the hybrid tastes of our generation. Even the experimental psychologists have, after many tests, become convinced that esthetic choice is formed by precept and environment rather than by the congenital predispositions. Thus it would seem reasonable that some examination of the nature of these critical forces which conventionalize judgment should be attempted.

The first foci to appear in the complex web of influences which form taste are the reviewer, the dealer and the museum. Each is more or less an active agent in broadcasting critical opinion. The reviewer, however, seems among these to hold the simplest position. His judgments, often the most assertive, are the least complex. His function is to tell what is on view and where; he must praise or blame broadly by a readable rule. But by the very nature of his position, he is dependent. Because of the commercial pressure he is compelled to take ready-made instruments of measurement; no one could expect from him either the accuracy of the connoisseur or the profound analysis of the devoted critic. He must rely upon what learning he can secure quickly; he must, to hold his position, take the authority he can get; in short, he must grasp tradition at every possible turn.

The reviewer is, furthermore, tied by the unseverable cords of commerce to the dealer who furnishes him the novelty of a new artist or the revival of an antique. But the dealer himself, although he seems sometimes in the position of a god, making and smashing careers, is not above the ironical necessities of his trade. However pure may be the esthetic principles he holds privately, financial security demands that he practice publicity, trading, hoarding; that he control and stimulate the demand for his particular stock. Some of this stock is, of course, recognized as "preferred." Tradition itself attends to that; but he must indulge in the vastly educative labor of discovering, verifying and maintaining this invariable security in prints, paintings, sculptures, rugs, tapestries and ceramics. In fact he is perhaps the most perfectly informed

of all authorities on the comparative vitality of traditional preferences, for these preferences, in his case, dictate the risk of millions of dollars. The dealer, in other words, is the compass for the traffic in taste; he is the implicit guide of the reviewer; he is the pulse of a tradition's vitality to the museum expert.

Museums themselves have been said by one of our well-known contemporary critics, Walter Pach, "to set standards which determine the public's whole attitude toward art." This, although an exaggeration in the face of the dictators of interior decoration, department stores and advertising, certainly applies to the more seriously educated classes. But the process of judgment within museums, where these standards are actually set, is a complex and subtle thing. It could well become the subject of an extended study. For the interest of this essay, however, this process is significant in so far as it relies upon tradition. The connoisseur (and nowadays the archæological expert) has little concern for the purely esthetic qualities of this or that thing. Just as the keen judge of the authenticity of a text has little concern for the inner truth of a word, so the special scholar in the arts seeks the rarity, the authenticity, the comparative originality of the remnants of past civilizations which he puts before our eyes. This, indeed, is the principal source for the excess of catholicity so apparent on the more erudite levels of modern criticism, for the intentions of the critic, however devoted to the presence of beauty alone, cannot but become involved, qualified and conditioned by the actual investigation and historical conclusions of the experts. As historical research pushes further and further into the buried mounds of the past, the actual field of vision for the critic grows larger, and his knowledge of distinct types of art, conflicting attitudes toward art, and contradicting circumstances producing art tends to swamp the esthetic considerations themselves.

On the other hand, some esthetic consideration must be seen to creep into the judgment of the scholar, for it would be ridiculous to assume that individuals whose chief business is with beautiful things, do not possess esthetic discrimination. But to discover what the principles of this discrimination are, what determines the esthetic value of the actual

objects in museums, is neither a simple nor an assuring task. One of the most confusing elements in the puzzle is the fact that taste itself is operating in diverse ways: it is one of the forces which persuades even the pedant to choose the things to be judged; it is also one of the things being judged, for the past popularity of an object is a fact for the historian to exploit, and the "taste of a period" is more than a secondary concern for the student of art's history.

Now in all the selecting and the judging in museums, the two considerations, historical importance and intrinsic merit (or beauty) may be said in general to be the pivots of interest. In most cases the conclusions reached about historical importance are quite definite, the result of immense learning; but the answers to the question of intrinsic beauty remain, on the whole, indefinite, generalized, and the result of intuition or taste. This is just the point at which tradition enters, sometimes with incorrigible dogmatism, but most of the time with a confused and inexact compromise between esthetic principles and educative demands. If the object be of a remote period, the historical considerations of type, rarity and authenticity push to a secondary place the consideration of intrinsic beauty. If the object be from the hand of a reputable or "classic" artist, its beauty is obviously assured by tradition. If, however, the object be of a period near to that of those judging it, the question of its beauty is embarrassing to say the least, and in general it is only after a critical acceptance of the late artist has been well established that the object is secured for exhibition. In other words, a tradition of perceiving and judging on the part of those whose business it is to perceive and judge intrinsic beauty, namely, the critics, has initiated for this particular art-work a traditional acceptance.

For the museum connoisseur and for the art critic, therefore, tradition subsists as the necessary foundation of knowledge, discrimination and practice. The further activity of interpreting, explaining, judging is also to a large extent traditional, for insofar as he exercises taste, he follows the patterns of his environmental preparation and discipline. Beyond or above these activities lies the attitude or the point of view which gives unity or significance to the critic's or the

expert's work and this too may be (I do not say must be) traditional. Tradition, therefore, is inescapable and necessary to all those who traffic in the arts.

2

Criticism, however, and not art, archæology or connoisseurship, is the subject of this essay; and it will be wise therefore to take a closer glance at the critic *per se*. It is clear that he does something beyond selecting this or that for approval. He is said to judge, to point out what is best, to condemn and to prophesy. But this seems to me an exaggeration. It is the evidence on the part of the public of a tendency to interpret circumstantial forces anthropomorphically, for it is circumstance rather than inclination which force him to prophecy and judgment. None but the dullest of those interested in the arts would be content with tagging all things black or white. I have met fools who seemed really to enjoy controlling the traffic between hell and heaven, but, in my opinion, at least, these men have nothing in common with criticism. It is the situation, for example, rather than the wish of the *press-critic* which forces him, often with appalling consequences to the fate of the artistic career at stake, to judge grossly and with such crude rules of thumb. It is also his situation which compels him so utterly to depend upon the most obviously traditional judgments or the fashions of the moment. He must use something ready made, for he has a month, a week, an hour in which to form and to express his opinion.

The true critic, however, differs from the press-reviewer in that crude black and white judgments are not his concern. By the nature of his position he is comparatively free. He does not have to tell people to go, to hear, to buy; he does not have to warn them from the folly of throwing away their cash. Primarily his value is not in judging, not in deciding for John Smith or the board of the most opulent institution over what objects to exert their roman thumbs. His business, in and by itself, is communicative, expository, educative. To talk about the thing, that is his function; to translate the quickness of it; to tell what it is, below, and in,

and around, so that through his words people may see more than they have before; so that they may perceive overtones, as we say; so that they may exchange vicariously through the critic the feelings and associations which run back into the complex darkness of their lives.

This labor of re-discovery, this communicative criticism, has itself a past life and a tradition. Current critics of every period, and of our own particularly, foster the illusion of literal originality about their work. So did the frenchman Du Fresnoy in the seventeenth century, who wrote a poem on painting filled with the platitudes of the previous one hundred years; so did Mr. Richardson who, in the early eighteenth century, followed the well-established grooves of renaissance appreciation; so did the academicians when, in their lectures before the Royal Academy, they differed with the judgments of their predecessors and protested the deadening authority of the schools, themselves the most perfect examples of the traditional taste of the late eighteenth century. One could carry the examples to infinity. Perhaps, to talk well about something necessitates, on the part of the talker, the unconscious conviction that what he has to say is significantly unique. Probably the sense of originality arises out of the inherent nature of the half-creative critical act.

But it must be said that the claim to originality is not without certain justification. Insofar as critics are honestly articulate they must achieve a claim to originality. The isolation, the impenetrability, the native idiosyncrasy of every human being is, in a general sense, enough fact for such a claim. But in a more precise sense there is to be found a large stock of conventions, almost mechanical, operating in all criticism and often controlling much of it. Such conventions are forms rather than facts. In their simplest character they are merely accepted conclusions as to the goodness or mediocrity of past artists. They operate, as has been explained, to select for all concerned, the "outstanding" authors, artists, composers, dramatists and architects, and all the "chief works."

But conventions take a part in the actual ways of hearing, seeing and feeling; in the terms which express the qualities of these experiences; in what Mr. I. A. Richards calls the "emotional attitude" built up by these perceptive processes. Mr.

C. K. Ogden in *The Meaning of Meaning* has fully demonstrated how large a part language itself plays in what we ordinarily call thought, and, just as the word matters to what we mean, so in experiencing art the epithet and all that lies behind the epithet, matters to what we feel. What you and I see in a single object will be (and the psychologists have constructed a whole experimental circus to prove it) *different*; but if we talk at all about the object we will invariably discover that we may share many common expressions or make a constant attempt to share them; these are symbols of the vain effort of each one of us to persuade another's eye to see what we see, to make his ears hear the sounds that trouble our own. Now this is the point at which convention is most active, for people are comparatively inarticulate and human intercourse must too often rely upon vacant signs. Clichés seem to establish the harmony of understanding, and tradition becomes the very essence of communication.

To know something, therefore, of our inherited critical conventions seems necessary; for only by becoming conscious of the traditional mechanisms of feeling, perception and judgment which, when enjoyed ignorantly, turn into prejudice, can a human being free himself from the blind bias which may cut him off from a large share of the world. It is because so little attention has been given to these clichés operating in respectable criticism that current opinion believes itself independent and profound, when it is dependent, often unbelievably reminiscent, and frequently confused.

It is therefore with an interest in our english critical inheritance that this essay was first conceived, and this is but a small part of the enormous critical tradition in the arts, for it is obvious that french and german critical formulæ have had great influence upon english tradition. But if this enterprise can even slightly elucidate the historical nature of a few salient, though unrecognized attitudes, it will have somewhat served its purpose. If it can further indicate to a thoughtful reader how all of us, whether in eager temerity or indifferent assurance, look at art with eyes of the past, it will have more than demonstrated its reason for being.

CHAPTER II

THE RATIONAL CONNOISSEUR

1

THE Fine Arts in England, from the dawn of the renaissance down to the eighteenth century, were in no real sense indigenous. The little life which remained in the gothic traditions of building, sculpture, illumination and wood carving after the Wars of the Roses soon gave way before the vitality of renaissance artists who were imported from the continent. Before the end of the sixteenth century architecture felt the imprint of renaissance styles. Jones and Wren in the seventeenth century adapted renaissance orders largely after Palladio and cast definitely the direction in building for the next hundred and fifty years. Although they employed dutch cutters of stone and wood whose work was skillful but characteristically hard and literal, the restoration revived the popularity of the work of frenchmen and italians who fostered the change of taste toward the baroque and the literal imitation of the creations of Bernini and Ferrata. Thus, until the gothic revival which began about 1752 and the greek and roman revivals at the end of the third georgian period, both architecture and sculpture rested upon french and italian models for inspiration.

Painting had followed a somewhat similar history. Holbein had visited the court of Henry the Eighth. French painters appeared in London during Elizabeth's reign and, under Charles, Van Dyke set the seal of the "Grand Style" upon english taste in the graphic arts. The english school of painting which began with Hogarth in the eighteenth century turned quite consciously to one or another of the roman, venetian or flemish painters of the renaissance for guidance, and even Constable and Turner, whose break with the technical limitations of previous landscape painting incited adven-

tures into new styles in the early nineteenth century, followed very considerably, and especially in their early work, the french masters, Poussin and Claude Lorraine.

It must not be assumed, however, that english art, because of its derivative character, failed to achieve the expression of a national feeling; but one must realize that english art itself had no strong roots in any but the soil of a continental culture. Hence it is not surprising to discover that, although there were handbooks on art in the seventeenth century, and references to painting in the pages of the diarists, a conscious critical literature of the fine arts did not arise before the first decade of the eighteenth century. This, moreover, like the literary criticism of the late sixteenth century, was the impetuous child of english naïveté and french learning. But because the appreciation of renaissance writers in Italy and France had closely combined an interest in sculpture, painting, and poetry, and had already begun to exploit analogies in the principles of style between these arts, the english dilettante of the restoration was not unfamiliar with dogma in literary criticism which could be applied to the sister arts. Already, in France, a lively interest in the criticism of art had attracted english connoisseurs so that Dryden felt inclined to translate a poem on painting by Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy, written in the middle of the century and widely read. Du Fresnoy, a comparatively unsuccessful student of painting, had turned to the criticism of first principles; in his poem he presented the most popular tenets of renaissance art criticism with proper grace and authority, adding a commentary for practical reference. It is perhaps this one work more than any other that crystallizes a tradition of precept in the arts for Western Europe.

Among the earliest english handbooks on the arts is John Elsum's *The Art of Painting after the Italian Manner* (1704), the title of which indicates the inclination of english taste to italian authority. Thomas Page's *The Art of Painting in Its Rudiments* (1720) and Charles Le Motte's *Essay on Poetry and Painting with Relation to Sacred and Profane History* (1730) are both highly derivative books, mixtures of advice and criticism from italian and french sources. Even so independent a mind as that of William Hogarth allows the decla-

ration in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) that almost everything that is worth saying about painting has been said by the two french painters and critics, Du Fresnoy and Du Piles. It is characteristic of him, however, and of the growing assurance of english opinion that he proceeds to show how original and important what he himself has to say is; while he turns to Aristotle, Lomazzo, an italian of the sixteenth century, and Michelangelo to find support for his opinions. The most thorough, independent and charming of these early english critics is one Jonathon Richardson, who published *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* in 1715, and a readable and gossipy book of good advice to dilettantes in 1719 entitled *The Connoisseur*. Richardson's first book was to become a guide and theoretical inspiration to Sir Joshua Reynolds some fifty years later when his distinguished lectures at the Royal Academy began in 1769.

Among these and other works I have attempted to choose three representative pieces of criticism which would illustrate to some extent the assumptions, the methods, and the temper of what becomes a definitive critical tradition. A choice among the arts themselves has been facilitated by the fact that almost all the criticism up to the last quarter of the century was written upon painting. The selection includes men of quite distinct temperament. Roger Du Piles, a frenchman, was an orthodox conservative. Jonathon Richardson, on the other hand, was an impulsive devotee of the arts with a sturdy determination to fix definitely for his public the first principles of painting; also to encourage judgments independent of mere reputation and market favor, upon the basis of these first principles only. Sir Joshua Reynolds is less naïve than Richardson, less rigorous than Du Piles; he is an eclectic in theory and practice, the wise and sometimes too gentlemanly representative of a matured tradition.

Du Piles has a conventional interest in the history of painting in so far as this involves a roster of important names and the retelling of old anecdotes about painters' lives. In this, he follows the much read and much imitated *Lives of the Painters* by the italian, Vasari. In his criticism, however, he is alert, analytical, and precise, both in observation and definition of terms; in fact, the definition of a term in this

early criticism is often carried to the extent of four or five pages; classification and authority were matters of habitual regard.

Du Piles, in his *Principles of Painting* (translated into English in 1743) and *The Art of Painting* (translated 1744), works out a compact scheme for analysis. The logic is old-fashioned in that, though it has the appearance of rising from fact, it is really deduced from the critic's notion of what the art should be and amply illustrated rather than proved by facts. There are, he says, three principal "parts" to the art of painting: *Composition, Design and Color*. *Composition* refers primarily to the conception of the entire subject of the picture but is divided into two parts, one of which, *Invention*, applies strictly to the selection of the story, the characters and the episode, and the other, *Disposition*, to the arrangement of figures, their proportional relationship in a picture and thus their position of emphasis in both the subject matter and the form.

Design, as he has it, applies sometimes to the whole formal conception, but more consistently to drawing, which included as it does to-day, the formal technique of line, perspective and mass; he believes it is the foundation of all the other parts. Raphael, in his opinion, is the master of composition and design; Rembrandt and William Baur, a German of the seventeenth century, "are not overcorrect," but are not without merit for they possess "sense and character." *Color* refers not only to the matter of local tint but involves light and shade or chiaroscuro. Here the venetians and the flemish are cited in preference to the romans or the florentines.

The proper treatment of colors necessitates, Du Piles believes, a careful eye for their distribution about the canvas, and a highly critical sense of the harmony of color relationships. He considers color as much a means of focusing attention as the disposition of the figures in linear relationships; it assumes, therefore, a direct relation to the subject matter, but it remains also a means of producing formal unity. He cites in this instance Titian's *Triumph of Bacchus* as a brilliant example of an arrangement which maintains balance and still concentrates upon principal figures. An important feature of Du Piles' scheme "of the parts" is his discussion of

chiaroscuro which is understood as part of the mechanics of color, but which is specifically "the disposition of light and shade advantageously on particular objects for relief and fullness." A general effect of rest must be maintained in any picture as a whole, and this is to be achieved by opposing, in a variety of ways, great lights against great shadows.

Now beyond this schematization of parts the story or subject matter of a painting is fully discussed. It is described always in detail under the consideration of the part called Invention. But the significance of the whole conception of Raphael's *School of Athens*, for example, in the sense of what Raphael has to say about philosophy, is given some five or six pages. This does not seem to me a disproportionate consideration. It is the style of the story that matters to these men, the treatment and the intangible qualities referred to, such as "grace," or "gusto," or in our own terms, charm or taste. The eighteenth century critic perceived what many of our modern critics are trying very hard to avoid, the inescapable relation of the subject matter to the form. In current criticism there is often an implication that form is not only the beginning and end of art but the significant middle as well, and this is said in such a way as to imply that the eyes of the past, because they saw subject matter, did not perceive the fine formal distinctions that excite our penetrating vision. But it would be difficult to find a more exact classification of formal elements than in the critical schemes of these eighteenth century observers.

Jonathon Richardson is less compact, though no less precise, than Du Piles. He declares with ardor that "The whole art of painting consists in these seven parts: *Invention, Expression, Composition, Color, Design, Handling, Grace and Greatness.*" The last part with the double name indicates to what extent his zeal for analysis has carried him. *Grace and Greatness* are obviously quite intangible categories and can scarcely be objectified to the degree of the other qualities, but they are the traditional epithets of the grand style. *Invention* refers, as in the case of Du Piles, to the selection and the development of the subject matter. Raphael's Cartoons are given as masterful examples; analyzed in respect to their emphasis upon dramatic detail, their "noble simplicity," the

unity of action in each. From these Richardson draws the conclusion that a master keeps the subject always in the realm of probability and maintains a proper seriousness; a general opinion which is most often associated with the literary criticism of Matthew Arnold, but which appears also in Aristotle. Everything mean or offensive to propriety must be discarded, the scenes from common life are unworthy, the interiors of dutch taverns are revolting to a refined taste and (no matter how excellent these paintings are in other respects) must be regarded as inferior. A naked boy on a dog by the revered Raphael himself seems to Richardson a breach of taste, and Veronese's dog gnawing a bone or "the boy making water" are to this connoisseur inexcusable. Rubens and Rembrandt, however, are cited as models of fertile invention for the dress and persons of divine figures, an important problem to the renaissance painter and to those who were to revere allegory.

By *Expression* Richardson means: first, the rendering of the facial expression for the story's sake; and, secondly, the registering of a certain mental attitude by the poise and gesture of the figure. Color is a further and attendant means of casting the spirit of a painting and should harmonize poetically with the expression. This is a shrewd perception of the psychological importance of color, and Richardson's suggestion is a modern feather for his cap.

Composition is for Richardson much what disposition was for Du Piles. It is, he says, "the putting together for the advantage of the whole what shall be judged proper to the several parts of a picture." This is not merely the arrangement of figures in the picture, but the arrangement of formal mass, light and shade. A general "harmony" or coherence should be attained so that the picture can be comprehended easily, so that the eye focuses, without distraction, upon the principal points. Opposing masses of light and shade seem necessary for the imperative effect of repose, the universal quality in demand; but Richardson warns against scattering the lights or letting them rest too near the edge of the picture. Here Titian, Rembrandt and Raphael are held superior to Veronese, Tintoretto and Rubens. Van Dyck overtops all portrait painters with the majestic repose and harmony of his

compositions. Richardson realizes that the dramatization of principal figures by an obvious and often ostentatious overcharge of shadow and spot light, costume, ornament and linear swirl, is the chief pride of the traditional painter. This gave him the feeling of civilized assurance which he saw lacking in the works of "primitives" and "unknowing" artists such as the italian Giotto or the french Fouquet or the flemish Van Eycks.

Richardson's analysis of *Color* is important only as he shows its importance to composition. The predominant colors of the principal figure must be diffused throughout the whole, since this assures coherence. Moreover, the variation of color should not be "merely in harmony," but should be related to the shapes and figures. At this point Richardson seems to be reaching toward an esthetic fact which he does not quite comprehend; for he is not so elementary as to mean "local color." Certainly he has in mind some relationship between color and form that was to be found in Rubens, Veronese or Titian; the seed perhaps of a color-perspective or color-form theory plotted by the post-impressionist. Richardson seems more aware of the significance of color than any of the other eighteenth century critics, but in even this regard his power of exact analysis falls far short. Though he emphasizes more pointedly than others the importance of emotional reaction to color, finding it paramount to effects of distance and space; however, when he chooses only the traditional warm, glowing tones, he obviously limits the emotional range. The great colorists are in his opinion Titian and Veronese and their flemish followers, Rubens and Van Dyck; Michelangelo had little or no understanding of color, and the Carracci, Polydore, Bassans, are all examples of bad taste.

Design is not as central in Richardson's scheme as it is in that of Du Piles. He uses it synonymously with *Drawing*. He does not apply it to the conception of the whole picture. Its function is simply to give "just form and dimension to visible objects." Chiaroscuro, however, he associates with design rather than with color, a fact difficult to reconcile with his appreciation of color itself. On the whole, Richardson stands firmly on the side of the academicians and would agree with a modern conservative that one cannot see the lines of per-

spective, or the form of a hand until, through "science," he *knows* the structure.

From his list of perfect draughtsmen Richardson shrewdly eliminated both Titian and Rubens, giving the chief places to Raphael and to Michelangelo; Leonardo, whose understanding of chiaroscuro receives the conventional tribute, he lists along with Julio Romano, Andrea del Sarto and even Polydore, whose insignificance became generally accepted before the end of the century.

Handling, in these eighteenth century schemes, is entirely a matter of brush stroke or manner of touching canvas. But Richardson is in no sense narrow in his appreciation of it. Handling should not be limited to just one technique, but should be suggested by the nature of the subject. Big themes demand bold strokes, and small themes demand "well wrought" handling. Pictures painted to be seen from far should be rough, those for close view should be more highly finished. Flesh, however, should always be "well wrought up," that is: closely painted with smooth blending of pigments, and then touched for the high lights. In portraiture Van Dyck claims his highest praise, but both Titian and Correggio seem to him masters of technique. He is as aware of the necessity for personal liberty in technique as any twentieth century critic, and he has a rational justification for his opinion.

The terms *Grace* and *Greatness* pertain to the talent of the artist and his conception of the whole. The greeks and the romans, Richardson believes, had more grace and greatness than any modern or renaissance painters or sculptors. In their work it is manifest (and here Richardson follows blindly the *traditional* opinion of the renaissance, a tradition with an erroneous historical verification) that all nature is raised above what is actually seen, even evil characters are raised. "The airs of heads," "large contours," "broad masses of drapery," "clean linens" and "rich textiles" are, he observes, aids to the great or graceful style. Of "the moderns," Michelangelo is the superb example, and any dutch painting is the reverse. Hogarth, of whose achievements Richardson elsewhere speaks highly, fails miserably in this respect.

It will be clear from the foregoing how much Richardson

is concerned with the form of painting, and how definitely form is, in his mind, related to the content or subject matter. If there is a question of one dominating the other, his position is theoretically that the subject or spirit should prevail, but in actual practice the formative principle interests him to a far greater extent. As an illustration of his method he turns to Van Dyck's portrait of Lady Exeter. Here, instead of beginning with the subject, he considers the more obvious plastic qualities first. He begins with the arrangement of the masses, of light and shade; then discusses the handling of surface treatment, the painting of textures, the drawing and the chiaroscuro; next to last, he observes the color in relation to light and shade and mass, and finally in relation to the mood which it compels; this leads him to the literary spirit of the picture, for he believes that "a portrait is a sort of general history of the life of a person." In this final interpretive judgment of the object, the critic's inventive faculties, his past experience, and his power of expression are called into play.

Richardson's remarks upon the various schools of painting sound strangely familiar to any one who has read modern histories of art or is acquainted with the conventional comments upon groups and periods. Two hundred years seem to have made little difference in the acceptability of the epithets used to characterize the famous masters. The list of the masters itself, though more limited than ours, is, within its limits, extraordinarily similar. In general, he says that the distinguishing marks of any school are to be found in the typical manner of composition, the way of folding draperies, the "airs of the heads," the detailed handling of pen, chalk, pencil or coloring. He points to the "majesty" of Titian, the "fierceness" of Tintoretto, the "rusticity" of Bassano, the "magnificence" of Veronese. He notes the firmness of Michelangelo's contours, his vastness of style, and Julio Romano's unusual treatment of drapery and hair. In Raphael's work he distinguishes three periods: the early, dry, stiff manner, when he painted under the influence of Perugino (who was not at all a popular figure in the eye of the eighteenth century connoisseur); the second period under the influence of Leonardo, with increasing mastery of chiaroscuro and greater freedom of invention; and finally the roman or classical period

showing the influence of Michelangelo, characterized by a matured grandeur of spirit and superb feats of composition and drawing.

It is interesting to observe in passing that the schools listed by most eighteenth century critics are almost identical, and in comparison with our comprehensive catalogues seem childishly limited. Ignorance of much that has been discovered and accepted in the last two hundred years as a necessary part of a critic's background conditions the comparative judgments of these eighteenth century enthusiasts. All these men refer, of course, to greek paintings, quoting the well-known stories about Apelles and the other half legendary artists. Du Piles, Du Fresnoy, Richardson and Hogarth all indicate that they are familiar with a body of classical information. But their knowledge of painting consists actually of a list of six, or at the most, seven schools. The colorful arts of the dark and middle ages, including what is now called byzantine painting were unknown or held in disregard. Through the eighteenth century the place of Raphael is increasingly lifted; next to him the venetian group is extolled, though notations are invariably made upon their weakness in draughtsmanship. The Carracci are discussed with considerable seriousness, especially in respect to their historical importance in keeping alive the noble art; for it was generally believed that painting, after the sixteenth century in Italy, had fallen into a decline. All these men, with the exception of Reynolds, mention the dutch only to scorn them; among the french, Poussin holds easily the first level of esteem, Boucher and Fragonard an increasingly low rank, while Watteau is thought utterly superficial; Chardin is, of course, not mentioned. A certain keen jealousy of the french is discernible in the writings of Reynolds; and at the end of the century this has turned to bitterness. The criticism of the then important classical revival which began with David's conversion to "antiquity" in 1775 is dogmatic and severe. Neo-classicism is recognized as an affectation, too dry and pedantic to be considered seriously by englishmen.

In contrast to the writing of the earlier critics of whose opinions the two just considered are typical, the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds holds particular distinction. Of all of this

criticism his *Discourses* are, perhaps, still the most widely read. He displays an extraordinary combination of talents. His verbal phrases are as graceful as the strokes of his brush. In his notes upon the poem of Du Fresnoy and the criticism of Du Piles he is shrewd and exact; he is generous with practical advice to students. He has large enthusiasms but he is immensely controlled. He is the very opposite of such a personality as that of John Ruskin, whose influence as critic and dictator of taste in the century following, rivals that of Reynolds in the preceding. Ruskin even in the most moving pages of his autobiography, *Præterita*, never rises entirely above the heroic gestures of his prejudiced sincerity. Yet one wonders more than once how much Reynolds' admirations for the grand stylists were but rationalizations in defense of his own practice.

Reynolds' lectures are so well known that a detailed discussion of their opinions would seem gratuitous in this essay, but there are certain outstanding tenets that mark the high spots in eighteenth century critical tradition. Like his predecessors, Dryden, Du Fresnoy, Du Piles, Richardson, all of whom he has studied in detail, Reynolds is a devotee of the "Grand Style." The chief characteristic of this style is its compelling simplicity. The "Grand Style" succeeds by creating the impression of perfect power and perfect repose; it takes a large view of nature, and is indifferent to particulars; it communicates thoughts and feelings by striking the imagination, and this Reynolds held to be the end of art. Extreme unification, however, is as regrettable as excessive diffusion of detail. Rembrandt is as unfortunately ostentatious with his masses and diagonal rays, as Poussin with his distributed shadows and his scattered lights. Raphael's frescos, Reynolds thought, were genuinely in the "Grand Style," but few of his paintings; for in oil Raphael seemed to him inferior. Michelangelo's ceiling, however, served as the supreme example.

There are two other styles which receive Reynolds' approbation but which are carefully distinguished from the grand. One of these exploits elegance; is rich in color and extremely fertile in the inventive treatment of the subject matter. This is called Ornamental; its chief examples are Veronese, Tintoretto, Correggio, who modify ornament to

express grace. Where the archetype of general nature, however, is modified to suit the temperament, where a consistently striking manner betrays individuality, a third style may be said to be attained. This Reynolds calls the Original or Characteristic style; it is to be found in the painting of Salvator Rosa, Rubens, Poussin, and a good many of the later masters. Rubens achieves sometimes the ornamental and sometimes the graceful, seldom the grand, because his taste for color and texture has "something sensual" about it.

In the discussion of "the parts" of painting Reynolds is less bound by literal definitions, yet he is in no sense indifferent to exact and scientific distinctions in the arts. He is in fact a candid opponent of the theory of spontaneity which, in his own words, supposes genius to be "a power of producing excellences which are out of the reach of art, a power which no precept can teach, and which no industry can acquire." Such romantic opinions throw about the arts an emotional haze which, he believes, confuses the distinctions between them, gives the mind nothing upon which to feed, and disintegrates rather than refines taste.

In contrast to Richardson, Reynolds discusses only four "parts" of painting. *Invention* refers to the power of representing mental impressions; it is the dramatic element in the design of the story which is painted. It is the conception of the whole, carried by the winged steeds of the imagination with reason in control.

Composition is the most important of the strictly mechanical parts; it enfolds the treatment of mass and light, the principles of balance, opposition, and proportioned contrasts; it secures coherence and unification. *Drawing* with its training in line and perspective and cultivated feeling for the linear swirl of the great masters, Reynolds thinks is essential, but he holds no academic brief for it; he believes that the schools may over-emphasize anatomy. Reynolds mentions the technical rules of color harmony, insisting that warm color should predominate, and dwells on the relation of chiaroscuro to color. Indeed, his discussion of the mechanical principles of composition, chiaroscuro and color is very precise; and his criticism abounds in useful illustration. One of the most interesting

of these passages is his lucid discussion of Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*.

"The conduct of Titian in the picture of Bacchus and Ariadne has been much celebrated, and justly, for the harmony of the coloring. To Ariadne is given (say the critics) a red scarf, to relieve the figure from the sea which is behind her. It is not for that reason alone, but for another of much greater consequence—for the sake of the general harmony and effect of the picture. The figure of Ariadne is separated from the great group, and is dressed in blue which, added to the color of the sea, makes that quantity of cold color which Titian thought necessary for the support and brilliancy of the great group; which group is composed, with very little exception, entirely of mellow colors. But as the picture in this case would be divided into two distinct parts, one half cold and the other warm, it was necessary to carry some of the mellow colors of the great group into the cold part of the picture, and a part of the cold into the great group; accordingly Titian gave Ariadne a red scarf, and to one of the Bacchantes a little blue drapery.

"What I just now mentioned of the supposed reason why Ariadne has part of her drapery red gives me occasion here to observe that this favorite quality of giving objects relief, and which Du Piles and all the critics have considered as a requisite of the utmost importance, was not one of those objects which much engaged the attention of Titian; painters of an inferior rank have far exceeded him in producing this effect. This was a great object of attention when art was in its infant state, as it is at present with the vulgar and ignorant, who feel the highest satisfaction in seeing a figure which, as they say, looks as if they could walk around it. But however low I may rate this pleasure of deception, I should not oppose it did it not oppose itself to a quality of a much higher kind, by counteracting entirely that fullness of manner which is so difficult to express in words, but which is found in perfection in the best works of Correggio, and, we may add, of Rembrandt. This effect

is produced by melting and losing the shadows in a ground still darker than those shadows, whereas that relief is produced by opposing and separating the ground from the figure, either by light, or shadow, or color. This conduct of in-laying (as it may be called) figures on their ground, in order to produce relief, was the practice of the old painters, such as Andrea Mantegna, Pietro Perugino, Albert Dürer; and to these we may add the first manner of Leonardo da Vinci, Giorgione, and even Correggio; but these three were among the first who began to correct themselves in dryness of style by no longer considering relief as a principal object. As these two qualities, relief and fullness of effect, can hardly exist together, it is not very difficult to determine to which we ought to give the preference."

This demonstrates how well Reynolds perceived the inner functional relationship of "the parts" which, in the writings of Du Piles, Richardson and others, are too often thought of as unrelated things without functional synthesis. It will be seen that in the discussion of the last point, the plastic "fullness of manner," Reynolds is pointing to a particular principle of achieving form: not the obvious and much used method of contrast, but a subtler method of modeling in low shadow. This is similar to that developed by the impressionists, in the range of high values, a hundred years later; made possible by an extended use and greater understanding of color. Reynolds, however, and particularly Hogarth, are aware of Rubens' extreme use of pure tints in painting flesh. In fact Hogarth has some interesting directions for this particular feat which are boldly suggestive of the modern juxtaposition of pure colors. It is probable that he conceived these from a study of Rubens.

2

Now, throughout the writings of three critics whom I have chosen as typical, and in the work of many more, there appear to be three obvious assumptions which condition the nature of the tradition that was being shaped. The end of

all art, first of all, is to please and to instruct. Secondly, all art entertains and all art teaches by the representation of gods or men in some kind of story. Landscape as such, was considered a secondary pursuit; portraiture was justified in so far as it presented human character in its noblest aspects; decoration, even, pleased by the literary associations in the elaborated motives. Thirdly, and in no apparent contradiction to these preceding assumptions, art must provoke humanity to delight in its message by the irresistible charm of a certain definitely described, noble style. The first two axioms are, as it were, the corner stones taken from the culture of past ages upon which the third was lifted as the structure of critical justice and truth. This tradition itself was not entirely derivative but consisted in applying these axioms to past and present works of art and thus justifying, explaining and interpreting them in the terms of a hierarchy of parts that like a consecrated tree was constantly nurtured and trimmed.

There exists no open defense of these assumptions for they appear as statements of facts, but they may be explained by a combination of historical causes. They arise partly out of the continued mediæval habits of mind, partly out of the zealous respect for augustin theory that inflamed the souls of these writers. The narrative elements in twelfth and thirteenth century art prove beyond doubt that the fine arts satisfied an insatiable demand for fiction. Moreover, the use by the clergy of stories, poems, sculptures, paintings and symbolic devices for moral exempla, spiritual stimulatives, and allegorical lessons, had brought about the association of narrative with moral interest. The new learning tended only to continue the practice, justifying it by the authority of roman criticism and roman art. A literary interest in classical lore might well coincide with the pleasure in a greek frieze; besides, there were the well-known sayings of Simonides and Horace on the likeness of painting to music and poetry. It is clear beyond a doubt that the analogy between color and tone which annoys the experimental psychologist of to-day was popular with such critics as Fenelon, Du Fresnoy and Dryden; all acceded to the truth of Horace's *ut pictura poesis*. Dryden, in his preface to Du Fresnoy's poem, follows his author's figure, "Painting and Poetry are two sisters," to the

extent of adapting Du Fresnoy's principles to the problems of poetry. Richardson and Webb further exploit the analogy on the side of painting, preferring Simonides' "Painting is a mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture" or "a dumb-show" as Richardson puts it; and La Motte writes, it might be said, his whole essay in confirmation of the analogy.

There is no particular need at this juncture to explain the theoretical implications of such an analogy, but some indications of the extent to which it influenced the critical judgment may be gained from the fact that Joseph Spence in his subtitle to his treatise on classical mythology, *Polymetis* (1747) states his purpose as "An enquiry concerning the agreement between the works of Roman poets, and the remains of ancient artists. Being an attempt to illustrate them mutually from one another." The attempt to illustrate carries Spence considerably beyond mythological content; in fact it leads him to apply literary criteria to the judgment of sculpture. The most extreme application of the analogy, however, is Father Castel's theory for the color clavichord, published in 1725. His model was first completed in 1734, and he expressed the most sanguine anticipation that his instrument would fulfill the combined functions of interior decoration and musical entertainment. It is interesting to recall that the popularity of such analogies is to-day to be discovered in our common phrases: *descriptive music*, *melodic line*, the *rhythmic phrase in a painting*, the *color in sculpture*, the *music of architecture*, etc., and that the color organ has again made its appearance.

All these causes therefore tended to identify, rather than distinguish, the various arts which are now so sharply separated. They also emphasized the importance of subject matter and argued toward a single style, the principles of which would be illustrated from poetry or the graphic arts, sculpture, or even music. But beyond these sources there is one supreme shrine of dogmatism, the fountain head of all rational discussion of the fine arts, *The Poetics* of Aristotle. Because Aristotle's treatise applied in its original form to drama, it was natural that his principles should encourage a demand for dramatic content in all the arts to which they were turned. It was easy, having read Horace, to carry back

a pedagogical interpretation into Aristotle. Poetic truth was perverted to mean the didactic truth of common sense, as well as a number of other things. In fact, as will be shown in the following chapter, the famous *Theory of Imitation* became the center for any definition of the fine arts which the temperamental bias of a critic induced him to follow.

A belief in the didactic value of art at once combined with the traditional pattern of the renaissance courtier and touched one of the most excitable nerves of the english character: gentility. Poetry and music had become, by the seventeenth century, thoroughly respectable pursuits for aristocrats, but painting seems in England not to have been welcomed into the courtier's palace of virtues for all its accepted superiority on the continent. Puritan intolerance may have considerably inhibited the pursuance of the art, for puritanism was possessed of a fiendish ill-will toward those arts which could stand as symbols of romanism. Mr. Richardson, for example, pleads a clamorous defense for sculpture and painting. He points to the gentlemanly traditions of the romans, the french, the italians; he presses into service the analogy between music, poetry and painting, in order to lift the graphic arts to the authority of the other two. The portrait painter must not only understand mankind, but because his business is chiefly with people of condition, "he must think as a gentleman and a man of sense. . . ." There is a good deal of high-flown rationalization about the "nobility" of the art in the pages of Reynolds' *Discourses* and nineteenth century critics are by no means free from the intimations of respectability which confound the interests of an artist with those of "a scholar and a gentleman." The most perfect expression of this attitude which I can recall is Pope's memorable couplet:

"To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius and to mend the heart."

This, it might be said, is not so far afiel from the opinions of those critics who, in our own day, would like to raise the movies, the latest offspring of the union of painting and poetry, to the position of accepted respectability.

Now the traditional renaissance concept of the perfect gentleman and the fanciful interpretations of Aristotle's principles are thus responsible for the third universally accepted critical axiom: all great art possesses an inherently noble or "grand style." Hence critics, as has been shown, interested themselves as many modern critics do in a highly complex and important discussion of form, for the arts themselves progressed into an increasing formalism. Briefly, the grand style was that which treated a lofty theme with dignity; which tended to generalize the content of a poem, drama, sculpture or picture; which exploited the formal symmetry and striking (sometimes ostentatious) contrast of its parts. Each critic in turn takes his particular gesture at definition, and each devises his particular rational exposition. The principles of ideal relation which were to wrest from "Nature" her universal truths, together with the mechanical rules of style, were believed to exist fully exemplified in the works of the ancient classical masters. Thus, when Dryden translates Du Fresnoy's directions for avoiding ugliness and selecting only the most beautiful things from nature, the rule is to proceed "according to the gusto and manner of the ancients." Thus Du Piles declares that "the antique has always been the rule of beauty to the best judges." Thus Hogarth turns with assured admiration to classical statues for the proof of his rule of beauty and, following a long line of literary theorists, Pope declares with chilling finality:

"These rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;

"Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy them."

The critical business, therefore, of the eighteenth century concentrated upon the detailed analysis of these three aspects of art; the story, the instruction, the noble style. The subject matter first of all was judged interesting, clever, unlearned, stupid, vulgar or downright immoral as the case might be. It is a serious concern for Roger Du Piles "By what Authority the pictures have represented under human figures

things Divine, Spiritual and Inanimate." He refers to the fact that the Church in the "Council of Nice," allowed God to be represented "under the figure of a venerable old man and angels under human figures." "Nakedness," he believes, "may also be made use of in the representation of allegorical subjects, the Pagan Gods or Heroes; in short on all occasions, where we suppose we look upon simple nature, where cold or impudence is not predominant, for clothes were only invented to keep men from cold or shame." The dutch or early flemish painters who turned their everyday life into decorative paintings with manifest skill and integrity, were quite out of grace and relegated to the position of vulgar, though expert craftsmen by all respectable critics down to the nineteenth century. Poussin, on the other hand, the exquisite composer of graceful scenes illustrating classical lore, was appreciated as much for his erudition as for his pictorial compositions. One of the best appreciations, in fact, of Poussin's classical invention is Hazlitt's essay written in the early nineteenth century. Hogarth, Reynolds and John Flaxman all emphasize the importance of facial and bodily expression in sculpture which, they hold, should register clearly and with dignity "the great sway of human passion." William Guilpin, whose *Essay on Prints* is one of the most comprehensive of any written in the eighteenth century, postulates that in all forms of the art whether in engraving, etching, mezzo-tinting or the then new method of aquatinting, expression or "the just representation of passion and character" shall be considered as fundamental to distinctive work.

But it is, I hope, clear to the reader from the examples of the critical schemes of Du Piles, Richardson and Reynolds that the issues of subject matter were by no means given disproportionate emphasis as against the consideration of style, though certain current critics would insist that such was the case. Moreover, it is evident that the dogmatic exactitude of the tradition itself makes it possible to summarize eighteenth century criticism in a few lines.

Style was for all these critics a dramatic formality; good when the unity of the composition of parts was made ornamentally striking; better when this unity included the varied

and ingenious effects of chiaroscuro, and best when it was achieved through a functional synthesis of mass arrangement, light and shade, design, color. These "parts" in theory were separated, defined and analyzed; in practice, judged by the sufficiency or insufficiency of their realization. But just as in theory they were understood as necessary to the whole, so in practical criticism their actual relation to one another was examined and the artistic achievement praised or blamed. The entire mechanical and formative business of style finally was believed to arise from the conception of the subject itself which, far from avoiding the accentuation of literary, dramatic or moral elements, became their embodiment. Pictures, to these men, did not merely entertain, they did not merely excite sensations; pictures said things about people, about life. Art, whatever the media, was a language; but by no means the least part of its thought was the manner.

3

The tenets of the eighteenth century criticism have, I fear, been presented in such a summary manner that the reader's impression of them will be falsely simple. This is the inevitable but ironical consequence of the method of historical summary. Generalization of tendencies, schools of opinion, currents of influence may stimulate understanding of a period; but the more clear the pictures the more surely do they rest upon a pack of white lies. The clichés, however, as I have attempted to isolate them, are central to the thesis of this essay, for they will appear again in the final chapter as unconscious but no less real parts of our modern vision of art.

It must not be forgotten that while the general tendency of criticism was, as has been shown, rational, academic and objective to the point of tyrannical dogmatism, there existed abortive attempts toward a reëmphasis and reform. Father Castel's color organ is a case in point. This impulsive inventor with the heart of a true romanticist might have been the progenitor of a sensual theory of the arts. Certainly the confusion of color and sound, the indifference to form, design, central idea and all the structural features typical of neo-classical art was characteristic of his enterprise, and should,

except for the despotism of well established authority, have led to a romantic revolt before it actually came. It is also interesting to observe that Boneau, who is held by the romanticists of the early nineteenth century as the prince of classical dogmatism, was in vigorous protest against the deadening influence of academic rule. In fact he called upon the authority of Longinus to support him in his demand for emotional elements in literature. He insisted that authors should interest, not bore their readers, and pointed out that the classical formalism, then in vogue, tended to discourage spontaneous excitement of the imagination. Finally Edward Young's reflections upon imagination are notable for their theoretical romanticism, following a neo-platonic tendency and distinctly contrary to the concept of imagination held by Sir Joshua.

What happened to these and many more gestures in the direction of romantic theory was that they found an expression in the justification for the baroque which, in its fullest realization, is not in our sense either "classical" or "real." An excess of formalism was admired in France, for example, under the name of classicism, and ran through the natural cycle of its unnatural character. In England, this disguise of romanticism is more discernible in literature than in the fine arts although many sentimental canvases were justified falsely as classical. There is, even in Pope for example, little interest in the "ideal" theme of greek literature or greek art. He was as incapable of understanding Aristotle's dictum, "The end is the chief thing of all," or the principle of artistic "necessity," as he was of translating the devastating charm of Homer. Pope's taste, in comparison with the other classical poets of his period, is infinitely more chaste and sure, but his muse is dedicated to formalism, not to form, and the venom of his satire betrays unmistakably the romantic "burning" of his egocentric soul.

Lastly, in the face of the tyrant rationalism, it must be recalled that a number of critics satisfied their impulsive yearning for escape through the gateways of neo-platonic idealism. This was as true at the end of the eighteenth century as it was in the seventeenth when Dryden, in his preface to *Du*

Fresnoy's poem, quoted Bellori, an arch neo-platonic casuist. It is typical of Alexander Gerard, a scotch writer whose *Essay on Taste* was published in 1790; it is also true of the academician, Opie, and is further established by the popularity of the writings of Raphael Mengs (translated 1796) and Victor Cousin whose preëminence in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was felt in England as well as in France.

But this discussion of tendencies contrary to the theoretical dogmatism of critics introduces the question of the actual relation of the practice of the arts to the critical formulæ. For example, what could Reynolds mean when he tried to take the best from such diverse masters as Raphael, Michelangelo and Rubens into his own painting, especially under the illusion that he was achieving the grand style? Moreover, how far did this attempt at self-justification by a tradition, falsely supposed to be derived from the greeks and romans, reach into and affect the actual practice of the english painters, to say nothing of those such as Boucher and Watteau across the channel? Further and most embarrassing of all, what is one to do with the romanticists themselves in the next century, such as Delacroix, who not only quoted Reynolds but outdid in formal virtues the english grand stylists themselves?

Thus individual modifications exist which cannot be considered here and though escapes were attempted, they are important historically for the reason that they were usually masked beneath a formal, or ideal, or false classicism. In the next century, when romantic art in all its variety achieved the seat of respect and authority, it avoided all the virtues of formalism and substituted for the cults of both augustinism and purified classicism the fetich of realism. The tenets of renaissance criticism, however, persisted, their authority gone, their tyranny an amazing specter of past folly. Like ghosts they occur here and there in the criticisms of the nineteenth century but to reappear with a new vitality in the twentieth. For the emphasis upon formal "parts" of plastic art is not alien to twentieth century appreciation; and there is an increasing fervor for what is called a scientific and objective criticism. These cannot be held to be original discoveries of

this century, for their constituents are too similar in character to the eighteenth century tradition. The "new" objective approach to fine art, with all its increased erudition, connoisseurship and prestige is but the recessive progeny of an equally hard headed, arrogant eighteenth century ancestor.

CHAPTER III

FALSE FACT AND REASONABLE FICTION

THE ventures in esthetic theory by english writers of the eighteenth century may be understood historically as an attempt to adjust a classical tradition to the content of their own art, still keeping the tradition itself and the supremacy of greek sculpture (or of what they knew of it, which was limited to those statues in Rome) essentially unquestioned. With the exception of certain eccentrics such as Young and Walpole, the spirit within most of the important treatises is fundamentally practical. What all seem to have desired, and what they seem to have believed possible, was a rational and usable science of beauty, based on the authority of the Greeks and Romans and the facts of their own world; a theory that would not merely illuminate the nature of beauty or satisfy a metaphysical lust for the truth about art, but would actually engender understanding and aid artists as well as critics.

Such a spirit and such a general undertaking followed, of course, a great variety of paths and cannot be represented by a nicely flowing progress from Plato through Aristotle to rank empiricism. It is largely by exploiting the german writers from Baumgarten to Kant, who have a much firmer metaphysical importance than the english, that one could describe a "current" or read order into chaos; and it is upon a metaphysical interest rather than an interest in the history of taste itself, that such coherence must rely.

Every writer of any importance, within this hundred years, is definitely influenced by the scientific spirit of an age almost too conscious of Newton's discoveries in the natural world. All, on the other hand, are familiar with one or another form of the classical tradition of art. This tradition varies in different minds in emphasis rather than in actual substance from a literal reading of Aristotle's "Art is an imitation of Nature," to the mystical notion of Plotinus that beauty is an

indirect expression of reason, the pure reality, through imitation understood symbolically.

It would be useless to attempt in the scope of this essay a discussion of the nature of the infusions from this neo-aristotelian, neo-platonic stock. The range of the speculations among the literary casuists alone is too immense; moreover, the constant insistence upon analogies between poetry and painting tends to obliterate what is, in our period at least, an important distinction between the art critic and the critic of literature. Batteaux' chief work, *The Fine Arts reduced to a Single Principle*, indicates how literally criticism united its provinces; but the doctrines themselves remain multiple; their exploitation resembles the combined weaving of a hundred spiders. The center of this casuistical web, nevertheless, is Aristotle's central thesis, and beginning with this, it is possible to draw forth three or four prominent strands which serve to spin for the critics their metaphysical gossamers and enter into the warps of esthetic systems.

The first of these follows from a particular interpretation of the term *nature* in the proposition *Art is the Imitation of Nature*. Nature is understood to be "La belle nature," nature formalized, general nature; not the nature of accident or flux, of "*sturm und drang*" either within or without the human being. Such a notion necessitates the perception in art of structural representation, formal organization, unified thought; it leads in the criticism, to the concept of the "Grand Style" with its characteristic centrality, contrast and equipoise.

A second turn from Aristotle's premise leads very shortly into the center of neo-platonism. To represent men better than they are would require a selection of whatever should best represent the form of the soul, whether noble characters, shapes or ideas. In the writings of literary critics this is often combined with a moralistic intention derived from Horace, Virgil or even Plato himself. For example, Dryden in his preface to Du Fresnoy's poem, which itself follows a neo-aristotelian rather than a neo-platonic tangent, quotes Bellori, whom he calls "a most ingenious author, yet living!" Having finished the quotation, Dryden himself interprets it, giving an excellent example of neo-platonic critical theory:

"The business of this preface is to prove that a learned Painter should form to himself an idea of perfect Nature. This Image he is to set before his mind in all undertakings, and to draw from thence as from a store-house, the Beauties which are to enter into his work; thereby correcting Nature from what actually she is in individuals, to what she ought to be, and what she was created."

Another distortion, and quite the most grotesque, is that of transforming Aristotle's "ideal selection" which must occur in the process of imitation, not only into "the image" of "Nature" referred to above but into a fanciful fiction. This fiction, however, is not in any personal sense subjective; the interest shifts to conventionalized content rather than an ideal theme, to formalism rather than to form. The excess of ornament, the baroque, even the rococco is thus justified; poetic diction thus claims the authority of Aristotle.

It will be noticed that among the above general positions the romantic temperament must choose either the neo-platonic emphasis or the formalistic; the grand style is too restrictive, rigorous and intellectualized. This partly explains why the break with the classical tradition or more properly, renaissance tradition, in the nineteenth century took the shape of a violent protest against rationalism in thought and the grand style in art. The renaissance casuist did not, it seems, include Lucretius in his background, nor did he carry out the possibilities in Longinus' *theory of the sublime* for a doctrine of primitive sensation. When Fénelon, in his letter to the seventeenth century French Academy says, "Poetry is doubtless an imitation and a painting," he turns to the ornamental, musical and decorative elements in poetry; he does not proceed to emphasize the sensual, the descriptive, the sensational. Such by-paths as lead to materialism, impressionism and decadent symbolism rest untrod until the mid-eighteenth century when the german romanticists, the rousseauists, and the utilitarians begin developing them into the highroads of criticism for the oncoming four or five generations.

It was, then, a tortuously complex theoretical inheritance that began to show itself in the english writings upon esthetics about the end of the seventeenth century. With an ascendent philosophy and science on the one hand, which could not

escape the enthusiasm of a growing national consciousness, and with the old world wisdom on the other, which had to be made the best of by every enlightened child of humanism, it is little wonder that the body of eighteenth century speculation upon the beautiful assumed a baroque character. The english estheticians, if one can be permitted to use an epithet that would have appalled them, seem to assume that it is their proper duty to discover the principle of beauty either in the actual formal elements of painting, sculpture, architecture, and even costume, or in the passions of human nature upon which beauty rests for appreciation, or in the external world itself. From observations of facts in these abstractions of the world called Nature, of the self called Human Nature, and of formal elements in the arts called Art, "laws" can and must be generalized which may be useful and definite.

David Hume, whose *Treatise on Human Nature* appeared anonymously in 1738, appears to have exerted little direct influence upon later writers of esthetics in England. Edmund Burke was undoubtedly influenced by the empirical approach which Hume took, not toward esthetic questions, for Hume did not make of them central issues, but toward a conception of human nature. Such an approach, however, with its emphasis upon the psychological principles of association and a coördinate utilitarian morality (all men seek pleasure and avoid pain; pleasure is the first law of action), might just as easily have been suggested by Locke, the father of the new moral philosophy, which is most complete in the doctrines of Helvetius, Bentham, Godwin and James Mill. It is interesting that in 1842 Ruskin, then writing furiously on the first volume of *Modern Painters*, turned to Locke for authority upon questions of sensation, rather than to Hume.

But Hume's esthetic notions were definite and explicit, so far as they went, and indicate a sharp departure from the prevailing neo-platonism in literary and esthetic criticism of the seventeenth century. He declares candidly that beauty cannot be defined but can be discerned only by taste or sensation. It lies in experience rather than in the objective world. Pain and pleasure constitute not only the necessary attendants of beauty but its very essence. This is the opposite extreme from the notions of the scotch writers Shaftesbury and

Hutcheson who, after Plotinus, are emphasizing the intellectual character of beauty. The question is thus transferred from an abstract or objective beauty to the nature of the psychological faculty, taste. What constitutes taste and how far is it intellectual? Hume's analysis is complex, but, briefly stated, bases taste on merely emotional discriminations or feeling. These have reference, however, to objective or structural forms on the one hand, and to notions of utility or possessive interest on the other. Taste is not identified with, but definitely distinguished from, possessive interest and given a certain objective content by reference to structural forms. Beauty is not a mere quality productive of pleasure and pain, but a particular kind of experience.

It is futile to speculate upon why more was not done with the esthetic possibilities that lie in these suggestions, or why the realization of these possibilities was put off for two hundred years and then issued as a completely new and original contribution toward esthetics by Messrs. Ogden, Richards and Wood in their small but exciting volume, *The Foundation of Esthetics*. But it is interesting to discover that the most fundamental step toward this modern theory was advanced by no other than John Ruskin, a century later, who never himself realized its implications and completely obliterated his own excellent efforts by an idealistic superstructure. Burke, who can be grouped with Hume in a general approach toward esthetic problems, made little advance over this position, but, because he appears to be more conscious of the classical tradition in vogue and because esthetic investigation is his declared field in his *Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756), he seems to be accredited with considerable importance. Five years after the publication of Burke's essay, another theory of similar importance was published by Henry Home, Lord Kaimes, entitled *Elements of Criticism*.

Burke, thoroughly familiar with the painting of his day, avoids all connection with the metaphysical abstractions of aristotelian or neo-platonic theory, and one cannot but suppose that he knew only too well what he was doing. He so limits his discussion and so completely frees himself from classical tenets that from his book alone, one might judge him incognizant of both the ethical and spiritual notions con-

nected with theories of the beautiful. Burke's classification of human experience, however, is so rigid, arbitrary and formal, in short, so superficial, that one cannot but wish that he had not been frightened of metaphysical traps. His method of argument is clearly aristotelian and he shows much concern for the precision and validity of the logic that cuts for him his necessary classifications. In brief, he limits his investigation largely to the province of human nature and recognizes sensations as the basis upon which to construct a definition of beauty. He distinguished two sorts of passions: those connected with *Self-Preservation*, and those which he calls *Social*. Upon the first, which may produce or be stimulated by ideas of pain and fear, he bases the experience of *The Sublime*, and upon the second, which includes the various manifestations of love, from lust to noble human regard, with their complex associations, he bases the experience he calls *Beauty*. Beauty and the sublime are separate, but coördinate experience, and their elements are often opposite. He is very careful to avoid a literally sexual explanation for beauty. Lust, for example, is a passion which belongs to generation merely, as in the animals, who seem to be incapable of experiencing beauty, but in man this becomes mixed with social qualities and particular ideas of personal beauty. As the sensational accompaniment, and often source of the sublime, is pain or fear, so beauty is accompanied or stimulated by pleasure and delight.

The most obvious weakness in all this is that, part of the time, Burke seems to believe that the sensations themselves are a cause of the experience of *the Sublime* and *the Beautiful*, and part of the time they appear to be the constituents. Moreover, the relation of the experience of beauty to objective and formal elements in nature is not so clear as that given by Hume, and becomes involved with feelings that are often called ideas and are confusingly intellectual. This, as in the case of modern psychological theories, is particularly embarrassing as Burke tries to avoid the more materialistic implications of a sexual theory. For it is difficult to keep ideas of social value or personal quality merely sensational and quantitative.

But the real contribution which Burke offers is his readiness to accept the ugly (the exact opposite of beauty), as part

of the sublime, correlative in this case with the sensations of pain and fear. Moreover, as Professor Bosanquet interestingly notes, Burke's insistence that pain and fear are often enjoyable, as in the case of tragedy, when their cause and consequence are not actually suffered by the beholder, or to put it more succinctly, when the sufferer is a beholder, suggests a real demarcation of an esthetic experience, especially as he denies a rational or intellectual basis for it. It is clear that Burke is insisting here on the difference between pain arising from a representation of suffering and suffering actually experienced. In Part I, Section XV, Burke says, "I believe that this notion of our having a simple pain in the reality, yet a delight in the representation, arises from hence, that we do not sufficiently distinguish what we would by no means choose to do, from what we would be eager enough to see, if it was once done." And again in Section XIV, "and all this antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes without our concurrence." He does not follow Aristotle's explanation of catharsis for he accepts only in part Aristotle's theory that we delight in the skill of the imitation and it is perhaps because of a fear of involving himself in the metaphysics of reality which hang hot about the phrase, *Imitation of Nature*, that he does not give more explicit discussion of the importance of representation.

Three years before the publication of Burke's essay, Hogarth published his *Analysis of Beauty*, which arose from a theory of line which he had long held and with which he, in typical impish delight, puzzled the slow heads of respectable artists. His theory is purely formal and extremely limited. He avoids all metaphysical issues but seems to have read of classical theories, other than those of Aristotle and Plotinus. He refers to various and vague roman sources in his preface to the second edition. He scorns Dürer's mathematical principles of construction, admires Michelangelo's supposed principle of pyramidal composition and refers to the writings of Du Piles and Du Fresnoy as containing all that has been said about beauty so far as what has been said is worth anything. In short, Hogarth shows an independent practical spirit, naïve and self-assured, and a tremendous faith that the laws of the beautiful may be discovered in the province of

formal art by observation of facts just as definitely as Newton discovered "laws" of nature.

Hogarth's assumptions, though they are implicit, are that the end of art is to please and delight, that art is based on the observation of nature and is developed by cunning under the direction of two principles. In nature, he observes, beauty and use go hand in hand; any object is beautiful which is fit to accomplish its designed purposes; the parts of the body in man or animal are beautifully proportioned according to their proper function, and this, says Hogarth, may also be observed in the vegetable kingdom. Thus he lays down a law of fitness or propriety for the conception or composition of a beautiful art object, and holds that this law must operate in the artist's observation of natural facts in design of all kinds. It will be noticed that while this principle may comprise or involve symmetry, it is not limited to any such static rule; indeed, although Hogarth points to the importance of unity in any formal composition, he emphasizes variety much more strongly. Both Lord Kaimes and Burke imply a false reading of symmetry in their criticisms of him. One may indeed observe the beginning of a notion of dynamic design tending rather to the idea of progress and freedom than to the classic virtues of rest and repose.

This is further substantiated by Hogarth's second principle, his line of beauty, which is the waving line, and its coördinate, the line of grace or the spiral line. All design which is most beautiful, he claims, is that which is most perfectly made of the waving line, and all that is elegantly beautiful of a combination of the waving and the spiral line. This he illustrates from costumes, from sculpture of the human figure and from the human face, relating these formal elements to the expression of sentiments and passions. His most amusing illustration is that of the seven different varieties of stays or corsets designed upon the curves of his line of elegance. Here he faces the embarrassing problem of which to choose and settles it by naïve logic. Arbitrarily he chooses number four which is the mean, one might say between the extremes of the bloated and the emaciated figure. Number one is nearest a representation of the ordinary male figure, number seven of the corpulent female, but number four of the perfect

female figure. But this is not enough, one is turned about: the figure, he says, which most nearly corresponds to this line is the most beautiful; why? because it most closely follows the line of beauty. It is difficult, at times, to believe that Hogarth is not making fun of the entire business of theoretical criticism.

However amusing—and Hogarth's is one of the few really gay esthetic theories I have ever read—there is definite historical significance to his contribution. He avoids consideration of the sublime and of all moral and spiritual questions as irrelevant to the practical purpose at hand. This gives him an immense advantage for concentration upon the formal facts in design, and his observation of these is more penetrating, fresh and personal, than any to my knowledge in this period. He antedates such critics as Mr. Clive Bell, Mr. Roger Fry, and Mr. Albert C. Barnes of our own day, whose writings stimulate and provoke by a similar acute observation of "pure" formal and "plastic" facts in art.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, at once the most important influence and the most important historical figure in the art criticism of the eighteenth century in England, published three papers in *The Idler* during the years 1758 and 1759. These state more briefly, though no more definitely, the theory of art that is later expanded through the famous *Discourses* presented almost annually before the Royal Academy from 1769 to 1790.

Reynolds' theory is essentially, but wisely, eclectic. He is aware of theoretical issues without becoming in any way their philosophical slave. For instance, he recognizes the common-sense aristotelian fact that painting is fundamentally imitative. But following the then well known french critic Du Piles, from whom he clearly derives his particular theoretical position, he utterly disclaims a literal interpretation of the term *Imitation*. He stretches it further than the greeks. Nature is the source of all artistic truth, but it must not be copied too closely, for common-sense observation shows that it is full of disproportion. He is very much aware, on the other hand, of the empirical trend of english scientific thought, and insists accordingly that the principles of beauty must be worked out scientifically, not merely from the limited source of formal art, though the study of great painting might teach

much to the practical artist, but from examining the nature of human imagination itself. He indicates here an open and undiscovered territory about which little is known, and through which he himself feels incapable of leading, but he points to the principles of congruity, coherence and consistency in man's psychological make-up to which art appeals.

The problem of representation is for Reynolds (as it was later for Ruskin) the center of his theory. If art, as common-sense asserts, is imitating the facts of the natural world, and if, as common-sense also insists, it is idealizing not only the appearances of nature, but the emotions of human beings, just where does truth come in? If one emphasizes the ideal, how can one claim any scientific basis for artistic knowledge, and if one emphasizes the literal copy, how can one achieve elegance, the "Grand Style," which any real artist knows is the ideal for him at least? Sir Joshua Reynolds completely settles this difficulty by what he calls, in the *Idler* papers, the idea of central form. He turns, as a good philosopher should, to the world of nature. Here he finds beauty to consist in the general idea of any species. "As there is one general idea," he says, "belonging to human-kind, so there is in each class one common idea and central form which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class." The artist's abstract idea of the form of objects is more perfect than any one original object. "Great painters correct nature by herself, her imperfect, by her more perfect." The distinction between general and accidental is here the criterion, and the "knowledge of the exact form" which every part of nature *ought* to have is the necessary knowledge upon which art is designed. This is the real truth as distinguished from the sort of truth that is found in opinion and prejudice, fashion and foolishness. To achieve this one must be learned and cultivated, to express it, skilled and imaginative.

In holding this theoretical position midway, as it seems, between three instead of two currents, Reynolds is serving as a kind of conciliator and popular doctrinaire at the same time. That he grew to the position of a real demagogue, there is little doubt. Certainly the doctrine of the *General Form of Things* remained in vogue till some time after the appearance of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and occasionally makes its ap-

pearance today. Reynolds' views on the "Grand Style" sculpture, principles of design, and even the enthusiasm of his personal taste considerably dominate english academic interest in art for at least thirty years after his death, and are not without their twentieth century posterity. The lectures of James Barry, John Opie, and the eccentric swiss priest and professor, Fuseli, show certain individual characters that are indicative of a changing attitude toward art, but the esthetic principles are in no way original or new, and are principally adaptations from Reynolds with the popular remains of Plotinus.

The signs indicative of change are largely due to the influence of Johann J. Winckelmann, whose writings seem to have been considerably read in England at the end of the century and the beginning of the next. The discovery of antiquities at Herculaneum in 1709 had led to the beginning of excavations, and in 1755, with the revival of excavations at Pompeii, Winckelmann began writing reports from Rome. From then on, the attention of english archæologists was turned to Greece proper, resulting, finally in the acquisition of the elgin marbles through the persistent efforts of Lord Elgin who conceived his plan about 1812. The significance of this interest in the discovery of antique treasures (excavations had actually begun at Herculaneum in 1738) was considerable for art criticism.

The notion that art had a history of its own, with a growth and decay related to the actual civilizations in which the art was produced and to some extent representative of characteristics of that civilization, its geographical, political and social factors—this was a novel idea in eighteenth century England. It would be absurd, of course, to claim that Winckelmann was directly its originator, but the particular form of the expression and exploitation of the idea is definitely influenced by him. Although, through the last eight or nine lectures by Reynolds, there are allusions to the art of the greeks, the renaissance italians, the dutch and the flemish, which indicate critical discriminations as to schools and individual characteristics, there is no emphasis upon great historical change, no sign of an historical imagination. But in the lectures of Barry, the idea is consciously exploited giving

his title to his first lecture *The History and Progress of the Art* (painting). Winckelmann, largely on the basis of the discoveries at Herculaneum, marks out three periods in greek art, and associates them with definite esthetic and stylistic judgments. The "Grand Style" is identified with Scopas and Phidias. It is not the lovely and graceful; this came in the third period beginning the decline. The grand-style is understood as expression of noble, idealistic elements, or, in his own words, "The expression of significant and eloquent silence of the soul." It is austere, calm, and without intricate gestures or decoration. Winckelmann also found analogies in his three periods, and their relative esthetic values, in the rise and fall of renaissance art, but on the whole he is completely out of sympathy with modern painting (that since 1400).

The most important contribution to art criticism, however, in Winckelmann's writings, is his general assumption that art is a product of an individual, living under definite geographical and social conditions. This appears rather from his general approach and treatment than from any specific statement. It is clear that he believes that style, or the way work is done, gives one not only the impression of a personality, but an impression of the social character of a people. Such an emphasis leads directly to Ruskin's exploitation of art as the index of the moral characteristics of any given nation or civilization. Reynolds, with his penetrating eye and rich human sympathy, had detected the personality in the work of numbers of painters, but he is still held strongly by the formal and objective approach of the neo-platonists on the one hand, and the analytical regard for general principles, characteristic of the scientific temperament on the other.

The revival of a neo-platonic emphasis which appears later in the lectures of the academicians may be to some degree due to the publication in 1796 of Anthony Raphael Meng's *Reflections upon Beauty and Taste in Painting*, edited with memoir by Don Joseph Nicholas D'Azara, and translated by a fellow of Oxford. The theory contained in these "Reflections" is perhaps the best popular statement of Plotinus to be found in the century. Perfection lies in God only. There is appearance of perfect reason in the natural world and it is this which art must capture. Art must, through apprehension of

the pure forms in the world, express what we call beauty, which is the visible imprint of the *Divine Idea* on the natural world. Beauty is thus derived from the uniformity of matter with ideas; these ideas arising from our experience and from our speculations upon "the destination" which the *Divine Wisdom* has bestowed upon all things.

In conclusion then, one must observe that, although the neo-classical tradition dominated the minds of most english theorists to the end of the eighteenth century, it was in itself not a single unbroken application of either aristotelian or plotinian doctrine; but was complex, differing in emphasis with each temperament. Hogarth, one of the earliest of these theorists, shows a particularly interesting variation both from the aristotelian emphasis upon representative truth and the plotinian upon ideal form. Turning, as he does, to the objective elements of line and proportion, he makes beauty very largely an intellectual experience. His approach, rather than his actual analysis, suggests Plato's emphasis upon form. This is interesting when one considers that he was, above everything else, the cruelest of the many moral satirists that the eighteenth century produced, and the most concerned with local subject matter in painting. Furthermore, though Hogarth admired Van Dyck, his painting is not technically in line with the grandiloquence of the late renaissance stylists.

Such a curious combination of formalistic theory, literary and moral interest with technical independence thrusts again into prominence the whole problem of the relation of traditional practice in the arts to traditional theory and criticism. Embarrassment is further heightened by the many instances in which esthetic theory is isolated from specific criticism. Few eighteenth century theorists quicken their hypotheses by facts drawn from the arts themselves; few critics examine the virtue and vice of their assumptions. Thus a rather baffling situation presents itself to the historian. First, a comparatively unified tradition exists in criticism, but the correspondence of this tradition to the traditional practice in the arts themselves is frequently questionable. Secondly, the theoretical speculations are on the one hand believed to be of practical importance, on the other, they are egregiously non-empirical. Thirdly, this group of mutually incompatible theories has

been traditionally derived from quite distant sources in the past but has been so modified by a reverence for a central authority as to produce the illusion of a reasonable classicism. It is therefore because of complexity that the relationship of the traditions in artistic practice, in criticism, and in theory lies beyond the scope of this essay.

So far as I can perceive, there is no adjustment or reconciliation of the classical tradition to the theories of the men who attempted to form a popular psychological doctrine based upon the recognition of the importance of sensual experience: these remain within a counter movement, distinctly in opposition to classicism and antedating late nineteenth and early twentieth century esthetics. At the end of the century and up to the time of Ruskin they are practically unknown to the academic group.

In all these different approaches to esthetics, however, one can detect the typical forerunners of contemporary theoretical positions. One could, with little difficulty, make pretty analogies between Mr. Hogarth, Mr. Fry and Mr. Bell, and then put them all in a box with Plato; or one could enlarge upon the affinity between Hume, Locke, and Burke on the one hand, and Langfield, Ogden and Richards, on the other, much to the discontent of the latter. For the immediate ancestry, however, of what remains of the classical tradition of Plotinus and of Aristotle as it reaches down to such conservatives as Paul Elmer Moore, Irving Babbitt and the late W. C. Brownell, one must turn to the expansive Ruskin and the forbidding Arnold of nineteenth century England.

CHAPTER IV

CREATIVE RESPECTABILITY

1

THE Royal Academicians, Barry, Opie and Fuseli, who successively took the chair of painting after Reynolds' death, are in no important respect original critics. They are each in their own way enthusiasts of the grand style repeating the critical tenets of their predecessors and justifying their common and superlative passion: the painting of historical pictures. This idealistic and highly irrational practice is at once characteristic of the decline of the tradition of the grand style itself and the rise of a romantic art, the real breath of which was to be felt in the painting of Constable, Turner and Bonington in England and thence in the work of Delacroix, Gericault and the Barbizons in France. The child of english historical allegory is of course pre-raphaelitism which, by the middle of the century, attains the seat of authority and becomes itself the english nineteenth century tradition.

The chief critical contribution of Barry, Opie and Fuseli, however, is the development of an historical conception of the growth of the arts. This is the immediate result of the writings of Winckelmann and the reports of the various archaeological excavations which stimulated interest in original rather than copied works of classic antiquity. Barry, for example, publishes in 1774 an *Inquiry into the Causes Which Have Obstructed the Progress of the Fine Arts in England*. He attacks already accepted theories; interests himself in moral and social causes and holds up english dilettantism and english prudery to scorn. His *Account of the Paintings at Adelphi*, and his *Letter to the Dilettante Society* are, so far as I can discover, two of the earliest essays written with historical acumen by english connoisseurs. Opie and Fuseli carry on the historical point of view in their lectures, continuing, how-

ever, to analyze paintings very fully in the manner of the eighteenth century critics before them. But by 1848, when R. N. Wornum edits the lectures of the three professors, historical scholarship must be recognized to have become established. The notes of this ambitious curator of the National Gallery not only correct the hundred and one errors in the statements of the academicians, but manifest what profound strides historical accuracy had taken.

Now historical learning may seem to have little real connection with a group of opinions such as that which was reviewed in the second chapter, but the profound changes brought about by this one factor can scarcely be over-emphasized. Not only did the accidental discoveries at Herculaneum in 1709, and the excavations begun in 1738, later carried to Greece proper, disturb the dust of antiquity; but they blew up the sources of eighteenth century classicism. Before the second quarter of the century there was scarcely an example of fifth century greek art to be seen. Many pieces of sculpture which, like the Apollo Belvedere, had been eulogized and accepted as the perfect embodiment of greek genius, proved during the century to be, to the utter consternation of dilettantes, not greek at all but roman copies of a period far removed. Little by little, as a result of the labors of archæologists, the folds of classical glory were torn from the figures of false gods, and not merely the need but the ironical necessity arose for purifying tradition. Thus broke up the canons of renaissance style which had already lost the spontaneity of earlier years. A new conception of art arose which emphasized the connection between art and the economic and social forces operating in its production; a new point of view on the part of artists and art enthusiasts encouraged an examination of their own civilization and threw into bold relief the inapplicability of traditional rules and opinions to the character of their own times. The ground was prepared for Ruskin's fertile theories.

2

The principal contribution of the nineteenth century to the great body of theoretical criticism in the fine arts was a

transformed concept of nature. The eighteenth century exhibited little interest in what the nineteenth century was to call *Facts*. These ultra-rational art critics habitually reasoned from the ideal, treating what ought to be as if it were actually before them. What historical facts they employed were found, in the next century, to be invariably wrong. The welter and waste of the external world was not described, for nature's data were distorted into reasonableness. The emotions of the artist and the beholder were left unexploited; a natural expression seemed to be taboo. Archetypes prevailed both in art and in art criticism; the critic's approach was relentlessly objective; he described the object as it stood before him, analyzing its parts by an arbitrary scheme; he spent few words on how he felt about it. Finally, in the esthetic theories there was no real empirical investigation, the laws of the science of beauty were general concepts abstract and applicable to a limited range of artistic types, often derived from the questionable authority of a roman figure or a greek metaphor.

The new industrial and ethical problems which arose toward the close of the century greatly encouraged an empirical approach toward social difficulties. This and the newly found historical truths about the old world produced an immense change in the general field of esthetic criticism. Poets interested themselves in the actual character of their own villages; led by the sharp observation of artists, people became aware of the "common man." Natural scenery, which for three hundred years seems to have remained non-existent, suddenly penetrated the rational inhibitions which had been preventing artists of all sorts from enjoying the flavor of facts. Rousseau not only became aware of the strong instincts within him, but had eulogized those instincts and set the fashion for talking about them. The germans were about to revive a mystifying confusion of sense, sensibility and intellect and to evolve what in their own terms has been called a spiritual priapism. The speculations of Schiller, Schlegel, Goethe, Schelling and others combined with the utilitarian theories of Helvetius, the irrepressible enthusiasms of Rousseau and the political abstractions of Godwin to muddle the theoretical intentions of english poets so that neither Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shel-

ley, Southey nor Byron could quite be sure whether their heads or their instincts were leading them.

William Blake, though without influence or importance in his own life time, is the first figure to carry out significantly in painting and drawing the romantic renovations. Fuseli, Haydon and Flaxman were all restricted by the vestiges of the old tradition, though Flaxman exerted his influence directly against the florescent tendencies in sculpture, concentrating in his own sculpture, drawing and lectures upon the austere purity of classical models. Blake's poetry, along with that of the other poets of the romantic revolt, is a striking illustration of a new and pagan spirituality. His attack on formal christianity is violent; his humanitarianism gentle, and disarmingly sentimental. The illustrations of his own and others books may be understood as the expression of a fantastical neo-platonism. It is not merely because of the polemic verses and notes which accompany the paintings and sketches that they seem essentially a criticism—a statement of the new art. It is because they construct so fully their own world; (his subject matter itself is an inverted, paradoxical christian allegory). In general, it may be said that Blake idealizes the human form by a distorted adaptation from the classical figure. His line is exquisitely sensitive and profoundly suggestive. In his critical aphorisms he attacks the grand style, academic science, and the painting of the venetians, the dutch, and Rembrandt especially. He would like to have destroyed the entire work of Sir Joshua Reynolds whom he regarded as a false prophet and an iniquitous demi-god.

In the midst of this decline of a tradition of three hundred years and the rise of sudden and surprising attitudes, John Ruskin began an essay in defense of Turner whose amazing landscapes were as yet indifferently treated by the critics. Before he was aware this essay expanded into the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*. Ruskin, however, for all his youth, his passion for landscapes and his rhapsodic word painting, is no child of naturalism, but the natural child of an age which made materialism romantic. He is the most quixotic blend of pagan sensibility, of scotch conscience, and of reason within the century. His character resembles nothing

so much as a complete wagnerian music-drama stretched over a span of eighty years. He adores landscape, indulges in descriptive writing from the age of seven, admires the lyric poets of the romantic revolt and reaches the highest levels of rhetoric in his eulogies upon the gothic orders of architecture. Yet, with just as intense sincerity, he venerates all the schools of renaissance painting from the grand style exemplified in Tintoretto and Sir Joshua Reynolds, to the religious canvases of the early florentines; he believes that the expression of truth, nobility and purity is the purpose of all art. In short, he follows a platonic tangent set obliquely upon the renaissance tradition, supported by a "sound" seventeenth century christianity, and an erroneous geology based upon the book of *Genesis*. A great deal of all this is expressed, especially in his earlier works, in the prophetic paraphrase of Thomas Hooker and Jeremy Taylor whose prose works were, for a period, his avowed models.

Sir Joshua Reynolds once referred to line, shape and color as elements of a language through which an artist learns to express himself. The figure becomes Ruskin's cornerstone; upon it he proceeds to erect his theory of art. Hence he regards art primarily as communicative. Art is a noble and expressive language; it communicates ideas. Truth, whose source is nature, understood to include human nature, rests in the statement of these ideas. But, as in language, the problem of expression immediately arises: how completely is art to be judged by the statement, by the formal rhetoric, by the sweet or harsh striking of the word?

Any answer to this query must be reached by some comprehension of the actual difficulty involved in separating thought and expression. It is a matter of genuine doubt whether such abstractions have any reasonable place in our experience. It is clear, Ruskin believes, that language may attract by its ornament or that it may seem to compel our attention by its expressiveness. The quality recognized as virtuosity is always more or less to be perceived, but is secondary and, by the nature of its very function, the thought is the essence of the art. What one thinks of as intrinsic beauties of color and form are really ideas of a particular type of beauty. To declare that an arabesque has no thought is to

blindfold a great part of the inner vision, to lift from life's actual experience one of its principal treasures, to deny half of reality. Thus art must be seen to be essentially expressive and "That art is the greatest which conveys to the mind the greatest number of greatest ideas."

Ruskin proceeds to run the risk of dogmatic absurdity; he actually classifies ideas. But it is clear that he does so for the purpose of discussion; he has been reading Aristotle; the academic approach seems to him, in his youthful ardor, the only fair method. There are just five varieties of ideas: Ideas of Power, Imitation, Truth, Beauty, Relation.

Ideas of Power are to be found in the pleasure derived from perceiving "the mental or bodily powers employed in a work of art"; from discovering the evidence of labor, strength or dexterity. They have to do with appreciation of excellence, based upon an understanding of the difficulties involved and the relative skill achieved. They are never to be considered an independent class of ideas, for however skillful the manipulation of a line in a cartoon by a great master, the intention behind must be comprehended; any measure of the excellence must bear a variable relation to the importance of the end. But the idea of power itself rises from the perception of the limitations of the medium, and thus "those pictures attain the highest ideas of power which attain the most perfect end with the slightest possible means." It will be seen that though the statement has the air of a euclidian proposition there is nothing absolute about it; the virtue of any judgment of skill must rest in the variety and extent of the critic's experience of art-works.

By *Ideas of Imitation*, Ruskin means simply the illusions experienced when one concludes that the object seems to be what it is not. For example, in painting, when the eye sees "round" while the finger feels "flat," there is an inner contradiction of sense, a surprise upon discovery, and a pleasure, not in the beauty or the truth or the power, but in the trick. This is that contemptible kind of idea upon which false art relies—contemptible: first, because the mind rejects address of the thing represented and fixes upon the irrelevant fact of deception; secondly, because the subjects of such imitation are petty—it is impossible to imitate anything really great in

spatial, temporal or spiritual terms; and thirdly, there is no power connected with imitative art, for there is no real difficulty. Difficulty necessitates the presence of a conception, a theme, something said. This in imitative art is entirely lacking.

It will be seen upon reflection that these opinions are an affront to renaissance tradition which tried to make the term Imitation cover all art. Ruskin explicitly objects to the elastic connotations employed by his predecessors and seems to be quite conscious of the fact that his explanation of the pleasure derived from skill in art is quite in contradiction to Aristotle, wholly unconnected with imitation in any literal sense. What may be thought to be a perverse restriction of the term Imitation is, on Ruskin's part, a canny move, preparing the ground for his central thesis.

Ideas of Truth are in Ruskin's system the facts of appearance. They differ from *Ideas of Imitation* in several important respects. They are not limited merely to material things, but include emotions, impressions and thoughts. He thus expands the scope of art over that held to be proper by his classically minded predecessors. Ideas of truth, thus, may be stated by signs or symbols or forms in which "there is no likeness of anything." Moreover, in landscape or still-life or portraiture, ideas of truth demand highly accurate perceptions of form, color and substance which are beyond the easily satisfied standards of an imitation. One may recognize an object in a picture, may even be fooled into believing that the object actually exists without there being in the representation any high degree of reality. The latent, genuinely characteristic truths of form which all great art must possess, may not be there, because recognition and deception depend merely upon superficial data, and often succeed upon gross exaggeration. A photograph may be no truer, in the sense in which Ruskin employs the term truth, than a melodrama, though both may, as any one would agree, be at once effective and inartistic.

Holding this position, it is not surprising to find Ruskin insisting that students should avoid rules for the correct procedure in their creative efforts. Too often these rules induce the slavish tricks of imitation. The manner in which the

hand or the tree is to be drawn, had better not be given as a precept, but only by reference in each case to the model. One can imitate the object by rules and succeed, but still get no more than a third of it. Ruskin agrees completely with Reynolds in this practice; "that the only way to ascertain ultimate truth in such matters is to look for it."

"Any object," Ruskin believed, "is beautiful in some degree which can give us pleasure," and thus, *Ideas of Beauty* have to do with the sensual and "spiritual" part of our experience. Why we receive pleasure from some object and not from others is not to be asked. The Lord God has so made us. But beauty is not to be defined by a hedonistic classification of pleasure and pain, nor, on the other hand, by an intellectual classification of archetypes. Beauty is emotional, a quasi-sensual, quasi-spiritual experience. The faculty which perceives the distinctions in degrees of beauty is called *Taste*; it is part of our *Moral Nature*, which in every great artist is refined to a high degree of perfection and purity. The evidence of this is the absolute freedom of the genius to choose right, to observe more acutely than ordinary people, to work with a coördination and vitality that is nothing short of divine. This is the central thesis of Ruskin's entire theory, the seed of his social and economic principles, the high point of his system. What he means by truth and beauty will be, therefore, the main purport of the following pages which pertain to him.

But one must comprehend in passing what is meant by *Ideas of Relation*, for they are an important classification, especially as they are related to types of beauty. They are "subjects of distinct intellectual perception and action"—i.e., thoughts. They are the elements in art which were particularly exploited by the classicists of the eighteenth century. They are what we ordinarily think of as ideas, the associative content of literature, painting, music, sculpture and decoration. They are, furthermore, the intellectual relationships within the composition or disposition of art's subject matter, the abstracted relationships of the various "parts." Though Ruskin's exposition and treatment of this class of ideas is the weakest part of his labors, it is one of the dearest to him because of the fact that these ideas of relation embody many

of his most cherished religious convictions, and hold whatever moral message is to be found explicit in the work of art. Posterity has held Ruskin up to ridicule largely because of the emphasis he placed upon this kind of content; and it is fair to say that though such judgments rest upon a superficial comprehension of the man's whole critical position, he was himself responsible for the general reader's erroneous conclusions. His voluminous impetuosity and his dogmatism produce the inevitable reactions; either ennui or irrational antagonism.

The sources of Ruskin's classification of ideas are interesting. They indicate the extent to which Ruskin was still in debt to classical authority; they also prove him allied to the new school of criticism. Aristotle clearly gave him the notion of faculties and Locke sustained, when Ruskin came to psychological considerations, the use of the faculties. The division of them into intellectual, moral and contemplative is his own adaptation of Aristotle, later amplified by reading Plato. The term idea arises originally from Locke and takes on, in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, a platonic connotation. This platonic influence grew and it is significant that he spent the later years of his life going over and over the forbidding book of *The Laws*. Ruskin had of course in his youth over-learned three-quarters of the *Bible* and the most sensational of his oracles are modeled upon its texts.

3

If one is to get Ruskin into historical perspective, thereby comprehending his theoretical contributions to nineteenth century esthetic criticism, the best measure is a comparison with Reynolds. The traditional opinion, as interpreted by Reynolds, about the question of representation in art was, first, that ideal truth could be found in nature; nature was the source; secondly, that each species had a determinate form which was in general unrealized, but toward which all inclined. Now Ruskin agreed with both these propositions, but this was as far as he went. So-called *general nature* Ruskin did not believe significant for art. A passion for natural scenery was characteristic of the period in which Ruskin was

brought up, and his parents did all they could to encourage an enthusiasm for landscape painting. Thus he could not but observe that the particular truth was the truth that concerned the artist most. Ruskin held that the importance of the term *species*, which is Reynolds' particular verbal key, was not that it included a whole class of individual objects, but that it particularized or separated one whole class from others. This was heresy so far as renaissance doctrine was concerned.

But this was also dangerous for the theoretical satisfaction of his own ideal propensities. How could one idealize the particular? How could one get permanence from the multiple flux of accidental variety in the natural appearance of things; or from the inward swirl of dream, emotion and sensual delight? The way out was discovered, as it so often is in these things, in words themselves. The terms *general* and *particular*, Ruskin saw, limit the mind to a question of "either or," whereas the important truth for all art is neither general nor particular but "that which distinguishes," in short, "the characteristic." Had Ruskin known at this point the esthetic systems of Goethe, Hirt, Schiller, Schlegel and Schelling, who in this matter are nearest to himself, he might have shrunk from continuing his theory, for the metaphysical bulk gradually accumulated by the term *characteristic* as it is rolled about like a huge snow ball in the writings of these men, is enough to stagger a far more robust casuist than Ruskin could ever claim to have been.

However, he went on to argue that the qualities which in art most characterize an object—man, animal, vegetable, rock, raindrop, snowflake or cloud—are those that at the same time constitute the perfection of its form. Accidental or individual differences arise from imperfections, and so the exact degree of perfection (for perfection itself is almost never to be found in actual nature) is the truth about the object which exists. The ideal or perfect form for the species must be realized from wide experience by the artist, for he could neither observe nor render the exact degree in which the individual thing has realized the perfection of its own form unless he *knew* the *perfect* form. Here, in knowing this perfect form, is the spot at which the imagination en-

ters. Clearly, this knowledge can never be absolute. This accounts for the variety of ways in which truth is represented by great geniuses, for all of them may approach ideal knowledge and can thus give characteristic though slightly differing versions of the particular thing they represent. Here, in comparison to the common man, the artist relies upon his instinctive sensitivity; the ability to ascertain the specific degree of perfection which each object possesses is what should be meant by cultivated perception.

This theoretical position, it will be seen, is quite distinct from the neo-aristotelian of the eighteenth century; it is furthermore distinct from the popular neo-platonic theories, for it possesses neither intellectual symbolism nor christian allegory. Furthermore, truth is not seen to arise from sensation stimulated by particular things, as the empiricists such as Hume and Burke insisted. Ruskin's theory is an example of a kind of ideal realism, original so far as theories can be, and historically significant in that it has broken through what Professor Bosanquet calls "the essential limitation of hellenic theory concerning the beautiful." He has reconciled poetic inspiration with the sensuous facts of representative art.

If one turns now to the second central problem of his esthetic system his conclusions will be found to be equally distinct from the rational tradition of the century behind him and equally important to his own times. This problem concerns the nature of beauty itself, involving as it must an explanation of taste and some criterion which may be used to discriminate among sensations.

Sir Joshua believed, along with most of the english critics, that man had a natural appetite for truth. Reason was fixed in the nature of things and in human nature. Hence the knowledge of what was truly nature was the beginning and end of taste, for the laws of beauty were the laws of a rational and formal science as Reynolds conceived it. Taste was to be seen in geometry as clearly as in music, painting and sculpture, and it was inextricably bound up with the notion of nature which was held. Thus, beauty, so far as he could describe it, consisted in the agreement of original ideas among themselves; in the agreement of the representation with the object; and arose from the correspondence either by sym-

metrical or proportional equipoise, by contrast or opposition, of the several "parts" in arrangement. The senses were bound to a severe and arbitrary system, the characteristics of which were rational coherence, and a complete indifference to the facts of emotional life or the violent pull and stress of sensual impulses.

Ruskin, in striking contrast to this, shows his kinship to the romantic critics of the new order. His first proposition strikes with astounding clamor upon an ear used to the conventional harmonies of the eighteenth century. "Any object is beautiful which in some degree gives us pleasure." This is a challenge to the whole armory of reason. It is a distinct denial of intellectual elements in the experience called beauty. It is wilful romanticism. Moreover, Ruskin demonstrates a far greater recognition of the demands of the senses; in fact his honesty, when his puritanical training is considered, is astounding. His examination of sense experience leads him to distinguish between lower and higher senses. Those of smell and taste are the more primitive; they are on a lower plane because they are merely necessary for the functions of life and do not lead to experiences of intrinsic satisfaction. The eye and the ear, however, are organs that are not only necessary for life but may be used to glorify God and man; through them is gained experience worthwhile for its own sake.

It is quite clear, he continues, that we do constantly make preferences, and it is logical therefore to infer that we should do so wisely. It becomes a duty. But how may we attain intuitional wisdom in these things; how may we cultivate, chasten, refine our impulsive preferences so that the moral faculty (for this governs all sensual life) may operate to its fullest capacity? At this point Ruskin turns, with unconscious irony, to aristotelian ethics. We must proceed by trial and error, choose those pleasures which are lasting, those which allow each organ to function with a maximum sensibility, and those which will most perfectly coexist with the "other functions of our system."

This insistence upon functional harmony in the direction of taste as he describes it, suggests closely the principal criterion evolved by one of the best known psychological critics

of our generation, Mr. I. A. Richards. But it is given a modern dress in the pages of his chapter vii in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and called "equilibrium" or "systematization" instead of the homely *Temperance* used by Ruskin and the Stagyrte.

This, however, is so far as Ruskin can be said to have adventured, and it is indeed, for the good of his dear ideals, more than far enough. He had, of course, no respectable biology, geology, physics or psychology, but this made the escape from the quicksands of empirical fact the easier. He thought he foresaw, for example, the possibility of training a nation's taste, because he not only believed taste instinctive, but hereditary: ". . . and it is only by music, literature and painting that cultivation can be given. Also the faculties which are thus received are hereditary; so that the child of an educated race has an innate instinct for beauty, derived from arts practiced hundreds of years before its birth." Larmarkian biology was a god-send to an optimistic esthetician.

With the conclusion of an examination of the senses Ruskin rapidly ascends to the ideal as he enters upon a further exposition of beauty itself. Through cultivation of these perfect virtues of sense we reach the experiences of highest worth, the experience which has been misnamed *æsthetic* (*æsthesis*) and should properly be called *theoretic* (*theoria*). This is in no way intellectual, it is contemplative, emotional. *Theoria* (and here the critic again relies upon terms alone) is the special and the highest part of the moral faculty. Our perceptions rise through the basic levels of *æsthesis* and reach the divine level of contemplation. This is where art through what appears to be a group of emotional archetypes realizes its greatest control upon human life and glorifies man in God's image. Here we attain those heights of *Love*, *Veneration* and *Gratitude* which are worthwhile merely to have been experienced.

Beauty itself, he continues, may be objectively described as *typical* and *vital*; within the confines of these classifications he lists the qualities of symmetry, unity, repose, infinity and purity which in turn suggest parallels of divine attributes. He does not insist dogmatically upon these universals but offers them as suggestions for all who would "understand

rightly" the nature of beauty. The mixture of platonic and christian idealism in all this is, I hope, sufficiently clear. It is for him the center of his whole discussion; for us, the evidence of an ideal empty superstructure imposed upon a vast and reasonable store of critical observation, the remarkable virtue of which is its precision.

The ideal conception of beauty is further complicated in Ruskin's thought by two immensely characteristic notions. The first of these is suggested by his constant preference for the adjective noble. "Art is nothing but a *noble* and expressive language," is the phrase in which the term makes its first appearance. Nobility is associated in his mind with the character of an ideal english gentleman; on the one hand, it involves generosity (*charitas*), chivalry, christianity; on the other, honesty and high mindedness, the ethical ideals from Plato and Aristotle. In fact, Ruskin slips ornament from his biblical storehouse of phrases into the middle of a long sentence, often to conclude with an illustration from classical literature; for there seems to be no appreciation of a possible discrepancy, but rather a genuine desire to console the virtues of the two cultures.

The second notion of importance, *purity*, is clearly defined and used with canny logic to support the most difficult point of his idealistic theory. Purity, he believes, should be used in reference to the vitality and divine energy in matter. It applies first to the material world; its application to moral states is metaphorical. When matter is dead, decomposing or inert, it tends to be considered impure; when it is alive, organizing, energized, it is pure. This gives Ruskin a superb advantage in the definition of moral qualities, especially as they apply to art. This is the logical bridge between what we call the esthetic and the moral categories of experience, over which he passes to and fro with impunity. Thus, the good man is the healthy, the energetic, the man in control of his vital energy. Thus all great art is vital, energized, "the work of the living creature, body and soul." Thus the artist, the most energized of the human species, the most sensitive, acute and perfectly coördinated, must be moral. The famous catch phrase, "No false person can paint," becomes preposterous only when it is isolated from its proper context, for if the

artist were not good, he would, in Ruskin's meaning of the word, have inferior health, coördination, sensitiveness. His imagination would turn to fancy or morbid vagary, his sensuous perceptions to sensuality. Decadence means for Ruskin, disintegration, functional disorder, evil, death.

Now it is quite obvious that the doctrine of faculties has played havoc with Ruskin's modes of conceiving beauty, but for his period it was a very safe formula. This is proven by the immense success in England and on the continent of his esthetic principles and his specific criticisms. The english public had become characteristically fascinated and frightened by the loose romanticism of Rousseau and the bold heresies of their own Byron. Carlyle had been thundering for a visionary reality in contrast to the materialistic pleasure-pain formulæ of the utilitarians. Here, this young graduate from Oxford had saved beauty from the frigidity of an intellectual heaven on the one hand, and the ill-bred heat of a hedonistic paradise on the other. The moral faculty was elastic and inclusive; it could incorporate not only so-called esthetic discriminations, but the virtues of chivalry, classicism, health, happiness and the english aristocracy. Those who believed in culture were ready. But alas! when the principles of beauty, truth, nobility, purity were focused on the pocket-book of the successful english capitalist; when the whole esthetic system devised for the defense of modern art was applied suddenly to modern industrial society, publishers were forced to discontinue relations with the impetuous critic and the press stamped him as a consummate ass.

4

The success of Ruskin's theories up to 1860 is not clear from the tang of irony when the application of his theories to the practice of certain arts is recalled. His ideals were taken literally by just those people who were most incapable of a wise use of them. It was not entirely the fault of the ideals that the excessively romantic group who, in 1848, called themselves the Pre-Raphaelites, should have realized the most perfect confusion of literary aims with plastic media that the western world had seen. In fact it was inevitable

that something of this sort should happen in the great reaction to the emotional aridity of the previous century that had swept England and France. Dante Gabriel Rossetti had all the temperament necessary for the misapplication of any ideals he espoused. He was not interested in the science of the day; he was indifferent to politics and social questions; his passionate devotion to the Bible, religious allegory, and the tales of Sir Thomas Malory, gave his imagination a cast which must have interested Ruskin considerably. Ruskin also perceived Rossetti's talent and offered the painter financial aid. Through him, more than any one else at this early period, Ruskin became interested in the group which included Holman Hunt, J. Everett Millais, Thomas Woolner the sculptor, and, in later years, Burne-Jones and William Morris.

Moved by what they believed to be the "contemptible and even scandalous" condition of british art, these men formally bonded themselves to the expression of ideals. They exhibited in the galleries of 1849, and Rossetti wrote in the pages of their literary adventure, *The Germ*, an essay in the form of an allegory which presented the position of the group fully if not precisely. Its title, *Hand and Soul*, suggests the half-mystical, half-sensual character of these aims. They renounced the external canons of the art academies and of what had in Sir Joshua's lectures been known as "science," but they protested their minute and painstaking fidelity to nature. The ways of God to Man were again to be justified, not through the guidance of reason, but under a moral instinct or what Rossetti calls "the heart's conscience." The beauties of the body were to be mirrored in a pool of spiritual emotion and the hand of the artist was to express the soul.

This, in theory, is a return to a form of neo-platonism previous to the schematized interpretations of renaissance critics, but the ancestry is nearly obliterated by the thick veil of english poetical sensibility. The lives of these men, as they attacked the conventions of the period with ostentatious eccentricity, making madness a cult, are excellent material for fiction; their art suffers, however, from a number of fundamental confusions. Rossetti himself tried to carry on poetry and painting simultaneously from 1847 to 1853, when he came to the conclusion that the literary endeavors were in-

jurious and futile. Poetry, he decided, was dead; all that could be said had been said; thence, up to 1860, he devoted himself entirely to paint. But the error lay too deeply concealed to be eradicated by this sacrifice. The false or superficial confusion of the categories of sense and spirit in theory, brought about by a wilful avoidance of intellectual discipline, is paralleled in painting by a false synthesis of symbolism and graphic imitation, conditioned by the failure to perceive the real possibilities in plastic expression.

It is difficult to understand how a shrewd observer of the art of Turner could have been seduced into admiration for the pallid, sensuously unreal productions of this school; but Ruskin gave them generously his public and private support. What seduced him was, of course, the sensuous loveliness of their work, and the intense spiritual devotion of their talk; any amount of earnestness could be read into whatever they did. Moreover, Ruskin saw and encouraged the one seed in this barren garden which bore real fruit; the conviction that art was not a parlor amusement for the culturedly elect, but a natural, healthy expression of human energy and character. It was interesting that the robust vitality of William Morris should have exploited just this aspect of the new idealism and that historically his work is the most significant. It is interesting, too, that this self-conscious, half-intellectualized attitude toward the fine arts should display but one real æsthetic talent, a flair for pattern design, which is a marked characteristic of the painting of the whole school, and which finds its most complete realization in the applied crafts developed by Morris and in the decorative stained glass of Burne-Jones.

Though Ruskin wrote a pamphlet devoted to *Pre-Raphaelitism* and though he was wont later to refer to Rossetti as "the chief intellectual force in the establishment of the Modern Romantic School in England," his ardor discernibly cooled. This is not entirely due to his personal disappointment in Rossetti's character and loyalty, which was real enough, nor to his discovery of his wife's love for Millais and the consequent annulment of his marriage. It is consistent with the balance and scope of his whole critical activity that the immediate enthusiasm should pass and adjust itself to the body of his critical canon.

Ruskin's real critical position was not that of *Hand and Soul*. He had not so completely renounced a regard for the discipline of academies, nor a respect for the virtues of eighteenth century painting. On the progressive side he had achieved a much deeper understanding of the radical change taking place in the "new art" than any of the pre-raphaelites. In fact Ruskin's own analysis of Turner's use of what we now call the plastic elements in painting, pointed toward the new impressionism in France, and though he did not seem ever to realize it, his own romanticism was much closer to the ideals of Bonington, Gericault, Delacroix and the Barbizon school than it was to those of pre-raphaelitism from 1850 to 1870.

For example, though Ruskin on the whole follows the eighteenth century contempt for the dutch school, he greatly modifies his criticism and holds Rembrandt, Cuyp, Teniers, and even Hals in high regard. His enthusiasm is in no sense limited to gothic and medieval art, but extends to all of the schools of renaissance painting, with particularly vigorous appreciation of Michelangelo, Carpaccio and Tintoretto. The one radical demonstration of his break with classical tradition is his qualified admiration of greek sculpture, which he believed inadequate in that "love in the fullest sense" remained unrealized in greek art. This he considered due to "the subordinate position of women" in greek civilization and the "partial corruption of feeling toward them." Greek art, he said, "reached the absolute truth of generic human form," and, if ethical force had remained, would have advanced to healthy portraiture.

Ruskin's technical analysis of Turner's landscapes contains the earliest and the fullest summary of the profound changes that were to reform the taste of the nineteenth century connoisseur of painting. Here in 1843-50 his justification of "modern painting" was beginning what the supporters of impressionism and post-impressionism were to complete in France almost fifty years later. He protests with less aphoristic brilliance but with equal ardor against what Blake had listed for scorn as the "cold light" and "hot shade" of the paintings of The Grand Stylists; he abominates "high finishing," the vulgarity of "brush bravura," the "false shadow and

substance," the arbitrary "toning" and the limitation of colors to warm browns and yellows. His discussion of what he calls *Truths of Tone, Color, Chiaroscuro and Space*, in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, is at once the most precise criticism of the aims of painters in the "Grand Style" and the fullest explanation of the virtues of new methods, that I have come upon in nineteenth century art criticism.

Ruskin points to the fact that the scale of light values used in paintings by old masters was sacrificed to the effect of one general tone; that the relation therefore of shadow to light was kept dramatic and often true, but that the relation of shadow to shadow was entirely lost. Color was either employed in the local sense, as in the painting of the florentines, or subordinated entirely to the general glow or tone of the later venetian, flemish and english masterpieces. This, Ruskin believes, tends to sacrifice truth for conventionally pleasing effect. Turner's great virtue was that he delighted in the gradation not only of light values but of color tints; thus he was able to exploit the inspiring change and movement of light as it plays over natural scenery. Turner, Ruskin observed, had also revolutionized the principles of composition and chiaroscuro. He did not follow the traditional practice of sharp opposition of light and shade, or of mass grouping. He used extreme restraint in opposing masses and in contrasting great lights to great shadows; still, he maintained unity. In regard to the arbitrary rules for space, perspective and the treatment of foreground, Turner had demonstrated the fallacy in the old rules. He had proved that space may be suggested without sharp contrasts; that perspective or distance may be obtained without the obvious devices of linear arrangement, or the accentuated drawing which the academies insisted upon and which the greatest masters themselves, Tintoretto and Rubens for example, did not employ. Finally, Turner had demonstrated in bold contradiction of tradition that foregrounds need not be distinct, for he characteristically "sinks" them to concentrate upon middle or far distance; and distance itself, he had proved, need not be vacant, but might carry the suggestion of life, fullness and rich form.

To this final achievement, the chief glory, Ruskin thought, of modern landscape, the new methods of using color and

light contributed fundamentally, and it is just this fullness or vibrancy of objects in light and in distance which is the great common feature of the impressionistic painters that follow. Ruskin did not foresee the advance which would be made in the study of brilliant light itself, and believed that it was impossible to paint objects in full high-light still retaining an expression of form. This feat Monet was soon to accomplish to the astonishment of the impressionists themselves, though it must be said that form in Monet's painting is scarcely a primary interest; and emphatically secondary in comparison with Pissarro's achievements. Ruskin is also quite unaware of the immense possibilities latent in the new uses of color for the expression both of distance and form which were exploited chiefly by Cézanne and Renoir, and following them by Matisse and others. But the critical ground work of impressionistic theory is certainly down in the black and white of Ruskin's analysis, mixed as it is with hard objective observation and the poetics of his subjectively empurpled descriptions.

This mixture may, in summary, be emphasized as the most characteristic thing about Ruskin's criticism. It is quite in keeping with the many-sided romantic spirit of the times; it is responsible for a hundred misinterpretations of his own critical position. That he should follow in the beginning of a chapter a severe logical rhetoric and break down or blow up into rhapsodic fireworks of prejudice; that he should appreciate Raphael for his classical composition and Rubens for his voluptuous color, Holbein for his restraint, and Tintoretto for his excess; that he should admire the wisdom of Sir Joshua Reynolds and revere the vision of Carlyle; all these are symptomatic not only of the breadth of his interests but the unaccountable drift of his temperament. They amount, at times, to a contradiction of points of view which, even upon a romanticist's plea of being above consistency, is scarcely to be sanctioned within the boundaries of criticism. I can think of nothing more ironical than the figures of Carlyle and Ruskin, the two most romantic prophets of the century, cheering one another along in pretentiously verbose claims for "The Real." The extent to which this passion for facing esthetic "facts" carried Ruskin, however, may be real-

ized from his insistence that "Whatever is truly great in either greek or christian art is also restrictedly human" and his further declaration that the "celestemento ballando" of his adored Fra Angelico was derived after all from "the Mirth of Florentine Maidens." Such an observation is perfectly in keeping with Carlyle's somewhat paradoxical dictum: "Either retire, or understand and record what is true," or again, "Romance for grown persons is Reality."

In this combination of rousseauistic respect for human nature, with eighteenth century reverence for exact rational distinctions and ecstatic adoration of neo-platonic, neo-biblical idealism is portrayed the very apotheosis of the critical anomaly of the first half of the english nineteenth century. I have taken Ruskin as a symbol; because of his influence and his inner paradox he may be considered an exaggeration, but the same elements are to be found in others. Often, in spite of his instability, his puritanism and his persistent idealism, Ruskin writes criticism which upsets one's convictions of his romantic temper. Such for example is the following upon Shakespeare:

"If it be said that Shakespeare wrote perfect historical plays on subjects belonging to the preceding centuries, I answer that they *are* perfect plays just because there is no care about centuries in them, but a life which all men recognize for the human life of all time; and this it is, not because Shakespeare sought to give universal truth, but because, painting honestly and completely from the men about him, he painted that human nature which is indeed constant enough—a rogue in the fifteenth century being, *at heart*, what a rogue is in the nineteenth and was in the twelfth; and an honest or knightly man being, in like manner, very similar to another such at any other time. And the work of these great idealists is, therefore, always universal; not because it is *not portrait*, but because it is *complete* portrait down to the heart, which is the same in all ages; and the work of the mean idealists is *not* universal, not because it is portrait, but because it is half portrait,—of the outside, the manners and dress, not the heart."

Judging from such passages as this it would be difficult to deny Ruskin the enthusiasm for a realistic view of life or the use of an objective method; the result is, therefore, that the critic of criticism becomes muddled; all his nice distinctions topple about his head; and he has to start again the laborious delight of reinterpreting his terms.

CHAPTER V

FOR ART'S SAKE

1

THE necessity for making critical epithets clear is nowhere more evident than in the attempt to understand the variety of reactions to ruskinism that arose in England in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Ruskin's influence continued almost without dispute until about 1860; and the popularization of art, especially the liberated art of the day, which in England is represented by the work of the pre-raphaelites, dominates taste till the seventies or eighties. Art academies, of course, still existed, but their versions of the grand style, their canovesque marbles, their imitation of eighteenth century portraiture and their genre pictures become increasingly few in number and meager in quality. The aims and the practice of the pre-raphaelites were seen to be both pleasing and instructive; they satisfied the polite romantic inclinations of the enlightened upper middle class; they sanctified with a tennysonian glamour the lady, the knight, virtue.

English connoisseurs seemed to be ignorant of anything that the new times brought forth across the channel. Insularity blinded english artists to the immense vitality of new movements. Even the barbizon painters, who should have touched the center of english enthusiasm for poetized nature, were not to be seen in the dealer's rooms till late in the century. Pre-raphaelite realism was acclaimed; french realism was decried; for the taste of these men was manifestly odious; they exploited "the deplorable side of modern life," hence they were bad artists. Even in the seventies and eighties the unprecedented revolution in technical processes carried out by Manet, Degas, Daumier, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and Seurat passed unnoticed. The english artists, the english

connoisseurs had enough to talk about; the impudent butterfly, James McNeill Whistler, had begun to hang his pictures and to issue his even more impertinent catalogues. Not even the dealers, the critics least of all, could tell which was bottom and which was top. It was late in the nineties before impressionism in the paintings of Wilson Steer and Walter Sickert began really to demonstrate in England that shadows might be purple, objects exist without edges and sunlight flood the figure of a model.

Nevertheless, in England the new criticism after 1850 actually proceeded ahead of the art. The revolt against the augustan formulæ of the eighteenth century had passed, but there occurred a variety of critical adventures, focused on the art of the past rather than that of the present, which fell sharply out of step with ruskinism and gradually altered appreciation.

In the public mind, Ruskin had come to stand for three principal things: the first of these, a worship of nature's glory, included a demand for faithful, literal representation, often called realism, but so conscious of nature's poetic effects as to preclude any possible misunderstanding of the real interest of the artist. Secondly, there were definite laws governing the subject matter of art. Ruskin had said that a miser's song for his lost gold could not be good art; there were ideals of nobility and purity which restricted the scope of art and limited formal expression (though Ruskin himself would never have admitted this) to one or another mode of didactic or at least optimistic symbolism. Finally, the popular mind had drawn from Ruskin's writing notions concerning the rightness and respectability of creative endeavor. Holding a belief in the artistic aristocracy of genius, Ruskin was flatly misinterpreted into saying that the common man was naturally creative, that art must be and could be "of the people," that if it were not, it must be brought to them.

The first important critical genius to part company with these idols of the market place was Matthew Arnold. Essentially a romantic at heart, he devoted himself to a religion of reason. He believed in learning, in the mental discipline of emotional impulse, in what is very nearly a mystical calm in which the intellect is sensitized, but all seeing and im-

personal. He sought to garner from both greek and semitic culture the standards which would form a liberal attitude, a profound judgment of life, literature and art. He made tolerance a passionate principle. Arnold, in his criticism of literature, is fundamentally reactionary. The great law of "high seriousness" is a kind of greek revival of the eighteenth century grand style. There is nothing baroque about it, but the classical allusions, the illustrations from sculpture, the over-emphasis upon nobility, right reason and lofty form, prove him to be a child of classicism in an age barbarous and trivial. The supreme sadness of his poetry arises from the irony in this inward and outward adjustment. Chapters of *Literature and Dogma*, his early poems, and his attack upon philistinism betray the scars of romantic longing. Emotionally Arnold could no more accept the universe than Ruskin or Carlyle; he sought always satisfaction from the imaginative heavens of possibility; he found, however, a restless repose in the rigid absolutes of his own intellect. He is the very antithesis to the critical temper of such a man as William Hazlitt whose effortless tolerance, whose clear personal enthusiasm for a variety of types, rather than a single kind of book, painting or sculpture, build for the reader a real world in which to perceive and to reflect is to enjoy. Temperamentally Arnold understood license only too well and the abandon of the idealist; thus he threw about himself an armor of learned tolerance and let his mind dictate what his heart approved.

Following quite opposite ideas but with the same latent fear of romantic idealism is Arnold's contemporary Walter Pater. He is the herald of the new paganism in England marked by a declaration of relative standards and an explicit contempt for metaphysical abstractions. "Beauty," Pater believes, "like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative." To define it concretely one must employ, not universal formulæ, but formulæ derived from this or that manifestation. In order "to see the object as it really is" one has first to know one's impression as *it* really is. "Our Life," he said, "is but the concurrence of forces, parting sooner or later on their ways." Reality consists in the discriminate knowledge of a momentary experience, or in his own words:

"The real fines down to a single sharp impression, a relic more or less flitting of moments gone by, a tremulous wisp constantly reforming." Experience (and here is Pater's central thesis) is itself the end; the criteria for discrimination among the passing show of impressions are frankly but perversely quantitative. The fullest experience is the most real; one must be present "always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy," one must "burn always with a hard, gemlike flame."

Art, Pater believed, is the expression of these real impressions; sensuously full, penetrating, energized. The necessity for cultivation occurs in that the actual moments must be made to yield their utmost. But the purpose of art is neither to instruct nor please; imitation, education, the glorification of God or man are fundamentally irrelevant to the artistic intention. "For art comes to you," he said with his characteristic languor, "professing to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." Criticism, therefore, is motivated by a desire "to arrest, for others, certain clauses of experience as the imaginative memory presents them"; and thus a true knowledge of his own impression, and a true understanding of himself become, Pater believes, for the critic as well as the artist a first condition of a genuine style.

The significance of Pater's critical enthusiasm for the art of the italian renaissance and for the purer types of greek and roman sculpture was that this enthusiasm discovered for a great many people a lyrical sensuality that had not before been perceived. Certainly nothing like Pater's impressions had been drawn either from the greek or the renaissance periods by previous critics. Winckelmann had perhaps come nearest reading into greek art the intellectualized sensuosity which Pater exploited; Keats too had written his exquisite ode upon the frigid loveliness of the grecian urn, but neither had found that peculiar combination of languorous sensuality and classic comeliness which is Pater's constant emotional theme. He completely obliterated the augustan interpretation of classicism, and into the art of Leonardo, The della Robbia, Giorgione and Michelangelo he read a curiosity,

a restless romantic insinuation of sought-for ideals, absolutes, passions, that revealed a world undreamed of and unseen.

Pater's avoidance of all moral considerations in art, or perhaps one should say his transformation of moral values into esthetic, scarcely needs comment. In his notorious phrase "art for art's sake," he is not isolating art from life, but living for the sake of art; he is limiting all living to qualities of sensibility; fining down his absolute to a moment of intellectualized sensation; for the single moment, I believe, was for this critic an absolute. It is characteristic of one who possesses this platonic temper, even though he declares values to be relative, to treat the notion of relativity as though it were an absolute ideal; and it is characteristic of Pater and his followers to fail in describing what the "fullness" of a moment is. The virtue of their criticism lies simply in the fertility of the impression, not in the penetration or the precision of the observation. This impressionistic richness consists largely in the complexity of emotional patterns which evoke endless but seductive chains of associations. Pater, by one striking question, defines his historical interest very clearly, and it is typical of his whole point of view: "In whom," he asks, "did the sentiment of a period find itself?" This it seems to me is the quintessence of romantic speculation; it might be called creative history, for the figure chosen becomes an embodied abstraction, and an impressionistic abstraction at that.

It will be seen, then, that an overdose of nature worship, respectability and democracy in art criticism led directly on the one hand to a reactionary intellectualism and on the other to emasculated paganism, both of which were given distinguished and notable expression. The attack, however, upon ruskinism, pre-raphaelitism, humanitarianism and democratization of art which caused the sensation of the day was the verbal repartee of James McNeill Whistler in his suit for libel against Mr. Ruskin.

The conclusion of Ruskin's criticism of Whistler's paintings had struck the high-note in this conservative's scorn for an innovation which might, if he had been younger, have excited his enthusiasm. "I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now," wrote Mr. Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*,

"but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." But the brilliant impertinence of the cockney's replies, although they swayed justice to the extent of damages of one farthing, shot considerably above the heads of more liberal critics than Mr. Ruskin, for the english connoisseurs were notoriously slow in catching on to this decorative poetical impressionism. Thus Mr. Whistler over a period of years had excuse enough to enjoy indulging his wit in his own catalogues (of which that of the Venice etchings in 1883 is particularly an example) and to bewilder completely the understanding of the public. His final answer, however, is not given till the famous *Ten O'clock Lecture* in 1885 when he pours forth his scorn in a cadenced prose as delicate as the colors on his canvases.

The polemical points of *The Ten O'clock Lecture* summarize neatly the critical departure from the popular tenets of the day. Democratization of art is first assailed. "The people have been harassed with art in every guise, and vexed with many methods as to its endurance. Their homes have been invaded, their walls covered with paper, their very dress taken to task." This, Whistler infers, has grown from a false conception of art's history. The notion developed by Winckelmann and much elaborated since his day, that art arose from the economic and social needs of a people, working to more and more refined levels through handicraft, building, decoration, to blossom into its full glory under the patronage of princes (if you held an aristocratic point of view), or the people (if you were of the school of Morris socialism)—a notion which is to-day to be found in most of the history books upon art—this notion Whistler tried hard to obliterate. The critics from Winckelmann to Pater are the focus for invective that has a most curiously twentieth century ring to it:

"So we are told that the Greeks were, as a people, worshipers of the beautiful, and that in the fifteenth century art was engrained in the multitude.

"That the great masters lived in common understanding with their patrons—that the early Italians were ar-

tists—all—and that the demand for the lovely thing produced it.

"That we, of to-day, in gross contrast to this Arcadian purity, call for the ungainly, and obtain the ugly.

"Listen! There never was an artistic period.

"There never was an art-loving nation."

And he proceeds to paint a poetical history of art which is the herald of the modern doctrine of isolation, which insists that "the master stands in no relation to the moment at which he occurs—a moment of isolation—hinting at sadness—having no part in the progress of his fellowmen"; that art has and ever will go her own capricious way, "and the people questioned not, and had nothing to say in the matter." This history Whistler closes with a final paradox: "Art is limited to the infinite, and beginning there cannot progress." This, it is obvious, is aimed at the very foundation of nineteenth century optimism: belief in the people, faith in the education of the nation's taste.

The third object to be shattered under Mr. Whistler's fusillade was the popular confusion of literary and moral with esthetic interest. This is almost too familiar to the ears of the present generation to need illustration. He struck directly at "the painting that elevates," "the picture that is full of thought," "the panel that *merely* decorates," at "the duty of the painter." All such criticism, Whistler claimed, "degrades art, by supposing it a method of bringing about a literary climax"; and by the misinterpretation of the middlemen who deal in such vulgar misconceptions, "the taste of the tradesman supplanted the science of the artist." A horde of pretenders have come forward, "a teeming, seething, busy mass, whose virtue was industry and whose industry was vice." It is these people who are responsible for the popular misunderstanding of the source and method of the artist. It is these, and Ruskin is the first among them, who have said that art must take nature as she is. This is the last of the critical idols to be overturned by Whistler's iconoclastic zeal. "Nature," he says, "contains the elements, in color and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music."

But, "to say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano."

Whistler's witticisms are not in the least affectations; he has the questionable virtue of literal sincerity; he practiced precisely what he preached. The preëminence of "selection" in his painting is very nearly notorious, and it has more than once been shown to arise from his study of Japanese art; but this emphasis upon selection is, in terms of the principles of art, nothing more than a brisk revival of an old formalistic doctrine. Furthermore, Whistler's own statement is disappointing for it avoids the essential issue. He says in the *Ten O'clock Lecture*, "But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful," and this, in the light of eighteenth century criticism, to say nothing of Ruskin's complex speculation upon the subject, is no more than the statement of a platitude. The question for the Augustans was what principle should govern the selection, not whether selection should be employed.

Whistler's naïveté is typical of the artist who ventures into theory and it is further an excellent illustration of the weakest spot in the modern formalist's position, into which Whistler, along with most of the isolation enthusiasts may be drawn. Embarrassment appears when formalists have to face the question of how far art may be said to represent things, people, and life, and upon what principles selection from nature may be made. But though Whistler's words betray his theoretical want, his practice speaks eloquently for him. He is the father of one branch of modern formalism which turns to pure design or to the poster. He exaggerates economy, maintains a delicate equipoise, achieves a stasis.

Whistler, having emigrated from America and spent much time in France, nevertheless voiced more trenchantly than any one else at this time in England, the chief dissatisfaction with the old order; he suggested implicitly the outlines of the new criticism. Oscar Wilde, in the meantime, had been exploding epigrams in the pages of *Dorian Gray*, the *Decay of Lying* and other works which were winged attacks upon the same set of Victorian conventions which Whistler scoffed out of countenance. Wilde shared Whistler's opinions about

democratic taste, morals, and nature in art, and they baited one another with genial raillery in their antagonism to a common enemy. Wilde became, however, by his pen, his reputation, and the glamour of romantic arrogance, the faded image of an impotent Byron among the esthetes. Independent of these men, though nearly contemporary with them, William Ernest Henley, by his reviews of painting in the catalogues of important loan exhibitions and articles contributed to the *National Observer*, led the interest of english readers, in the eighties and nineties, back to the awakening of the earlier part of the century. He expressed glowing enthusiasm for the chiefs of the romantic school, Constable, Bonington, Delacroix, Gericault, and turned the attention of his public to the leaders of the barbizon group who had already been accepted by the most progressive. This was perfect preparation for the public acceptance of impressionism.

The pen of George Moore is the first fully to round out the periods of "the new criticism." He, like Whistler, had lived among the new influences in Paris. His work was not extensive in critical articles proper, but his novels and conversational essays abound in illuminating reflections upon the lives and the works of important painters of many schools. In his *Modern Painters* he heralds the twentieth century scorn for bourgeois morality, for the taste of the villa, for academism. He attacks with his characteristic blend of earnestness and impiety artistic education in France and England. He flays relentlessly the commercialism of the Royal Academy. In short, Moore carries on the polemics of James McNeill Whistler, but in criticism both extensive and precise.

The nineteenth century curiosity for foreign scenes, travel, geographical novelty, seemed to Moore to have ruined the possible achievements of the english landscape painters. In a fable about an artist who remarked as he stood upon the banks of the Seine: "Nothing is more interesting to paint than a shepherd on the banks of a river," Moore adds the comment, "He did not say the Seine—he said a river." The subject of religious painting inspired Moore to some of his most telling raillery and it is the chapter called *Religiosity in Art* which contains the delightful story of the lady who, after gazing upon *The Return from Calvary*, a picture by Schmalz, and

wandering into a room full of landscapes was heard to exclaim, "Trees, mere trees! What are trees after having had one's soul elevated?"

Moore's importance, it may be said, lies rather in his observation than in his judgment. He venerates Whistler to an absurd extent, while he regards with only slight interest the achievements of Steer and Sickert who, in his own day, proceeded considerably beyond Whistler in their handling of genuine plastic elements. His discrimination among the impressionists is guided largely by early affiliations and prejudice. He seems not to have understood Renoir and he belittles Monet, choosing Pissarro as the important figure of the school. But he is not taken in by the false impressionism of Sargent or Besnard, and whatever one may think of his evaluations of the work of different men, it is significant that he sees in their pictures just those features which fifty years have thrown up into perspective as definitive. The pertinent facts about Whistler, for example, are there and can be easily detached from the eulogy; the astutely perceived weaknesses in Monet are further evidence of penetration, just as his admiration for Corot, Manet, Degas, and Pissarro detects the precise sources of power in each. In fact, Moore is most interesting when in argument; his defense of Degas' *L'Absinthe*, before the aspersions of two well-known critics of the day, illustrates at once the limitations of the critical vision of his period and the precision of his own insight. All through Moore's criticism there is to be found the observation of a mind alert for "the esthetic fact" and though caprice is the egregious characteristic of his style, it stimulates rather than lessens the gusto of a reader's attention.

Now reaching for facts of line, composition, color and space is representative of a new interest in nineteenth century criticism. It is the positive or constructive side of a new appreciation; it is the statement of a consistent attitude toward art with its distinct method of judgment. This differs from the popular view of the period in that it puts aside matters of sentiment, morals, and literary association on the one hand, and the self-conscious, academic realism, the superficial verisimilitude of the pre-raphaelites on the other. It attempts to judge painting first upon the merits of its formative ele-

ments and then upon the significance of the spirit. This is closer to the critical approach of the eighteenth century than to that of the mid-victorian. Finally, in this new criticism, the concept of nature, so important in the minds of all nineteenth century writers on art, is rid both of the sentimental lyricism which had accumulated about it and of the subjective focus upon the natural self. It is given a revived objectivity; the veils of idealism are drawn aside and both artist and critic with a so-called "scientific" earnestness look upon "the heart of nature" as a phenomenon to be understood analytically before it be judged.

2

Conclusions

The historical dénouement of these late nineteenth century reactions to ruskinism is properly to be found in the confusion of current art criticism. But a study of the elements carried on and actively operating in current criticism is for the obvious reasons of space and time impossible. I shall content myself, therefore, with a brief summary of only the salient traditions in our talk about art, hoping that such a discussion will breed awareness, skepticism and analysis on the part of others, rather than open acceptance or rejection of generalizations that can be, by the very nature of the case, no more than half truths at the most.

The esthetic speculations of current writers have been most lucidly discussed by Miss Katherine Gilbert in her small volume *Studies in Recent Æsthetics*, which, in itself, is by no means an unoriginal contribution to the literature of esthetics. Miss Gilbert draws from the welter and confusion of current writing four chief schools and distinguishes them by their general approach and primary assumptions. The psychologists, including Lipps, Langfeld and many others set out to discover facts: the physical and mental components in the esthetic experience; what it is that is liked; what constitutes liking. Their conclusions, Miss Gilbert points out, are relative; their assumptions often precarious, and questions arise from their work which are primarily philosophical and

which the limited method of empirical science is incapable of solving.

The formalists, of which Mr. Bell and Mr. Fry are the best known examples, are contrasted with the foregoing by the opposition of their approach. They are characterized by their insistence that "art begins where fact ends"; that an esthetic experience, distinct from all other kinds of experience, does exist; that art is above and beyond, and must be understood to be separate from all moral and social considerations. This doctrine of isolation allows Miss Gilbert to distinguish from the formalists a third group, the genetic school, who tend to agree with Mr. Dewey that such separation "makes morality dull, perfunctory and self-righteous, art undisciplined and parasitic"; and who hold like Mr. Santayana and Mr. Buer-meyer that both moral and religious experience may be esthetic; who insist, in short, upon approaching the study of the experience of art from the point of view of its origin. Finally, Croce and his followers, Carrit, Collingwood and J. A. Smith are distinguished from the foregoing by their emphatic insistence upon the universality of esthetic experience and its intuitional nature. But the most interesting parts of Miss Gilbert's book are her discussions of the theories of Bosanquet, Bergson, Croce, Santayana and her illuminating criticism of the method of relativity implicit in the writings of M. Lalo.

Just as Miss Gilbert has summarized the esthetic theories, so might one turn the drive and drift of current criticism into four distinct channels. The approach of a criticism and the primary assumptions involved, to some extent characterize its type. It would be possible also to classify groups of critics under such names as would suggest not only their assumptions and their approach but the traditional elements in them.

The spirit, for example, of Pater's appreciation is still active and distinguishes certain critics who hold that of a "pagan wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most." Others of near kin are characterized by the fire of Rousseau to revolt against the demands which the science of any art makes upon the emotional liberty of the artist. These wish to obliterate rules and the rigors of artifice: like Wordsworth they insist upon spontaneity: like

George Moore they attack the imposition of moral precepts in art. Another branch of the family worships titanism, cruelty, ugliness, dissonance, and finds the sublime only within that which seems to arise from primitive instinct or the frustration of natural desire; who find "strength" in Cézanne, power in the art of primitive peoples, sublimity in the machine and the skyscraper. All these might be grouped in one class under the head of emotionalists, for they discover emotions rather than precise feelings in art. The subdivisions would indicate their ancestry: the neo-paterians, the rousseauists, wagnerites, industrial revolutionists, etc. The roster of names would include such diverse spirits as Vernon Lee, Michael Gold, Walter Pach, Gilbert Seldes. They are all romantic in that they are seeking a kind of modern essence or a single sensational entity, and they point to the relativity of appearance as ground for their contention that systems of values, intellectual archetypes, absolutes, do not in real art exist. They all believe they see "esthetic facts."

The second group in this general classification would include those who like Arnold on the one hand, or Whistler on the other, are interested in ideal form or in decorative form above all else. They tend to accentuate intellectual essences rather than emotional, though by raising form to the highest point of regard they can develop an ecstatic appreciation very similar to a mystical tremor. German esthetics of the idealistic school is the real ancestor of this group, but they descend, too, from a long line of neo-platonists or from the romantically tempered formalists of the eighteenth century. The academic conservatives might be represented by Charles H. Caffin and Denman Ross; the radicals by Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Jan Gordon, Sheldon Cheney, and the historians to some extent by Helen Gardner. The key words to their point of view would seem to be *structure*, *pure design*, *pure form*, *significant form*, *intuitional form*, *isolated plasticity*: these are their "esthetic facts." They are neo-platonists.

Another cluster of modern critics, though quite distinct from those described above, share much with them. These might be called the neo-augustan. They have no mysticism, but they believe wholeheartedly in form and in the presence in art of intellectual elements. They frequently admit that

subject matter has relevance. They are characterized particularly by the exploitation of a conscious method of criticism. They protest, if I may exaggerate upon their claims, a naïveté. They proceed "scientifically" to analyze the objective elements of a work of art, but freshly as they meet it, with no preconceived preferences as to better or worse; they trust their perception of the "esthetic facts" themselves to lead them wherever it may. Their naïveté, however, does not imply a faith in ignorance, for they seem to consider all modern science valuable to a greater understanding of art as well as of life. In a word, they believe in reason, though not so limited a concept of the term as that of their latin or eighteenth century ancestors.

The journals of the Barnes Foundations are excellent examples of this kind of criticism and so, also, is Guillaume and Munro's book, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*; many of the best monographs published under the auspices of university art and archæological departments would fall into this group. Precise observation of "esthetic" and of "technical" fact is the keynote; analytical, not impressionistic integrity is the essence of the spirit.

Finally, a fourth group of critics may be distinguished from the preceding. These hold the striking assumption that art and life are one; that no criticism may possess the fullest value which takes a disparate view of the fine arts on the one hand and the lively arts on the other. Moreover, the method of this criticism is predominantly historical, though it may share a great deal in common with that of the scientific analysts. The subject matter for these critics is, in comparison with the form of any piece of art, either more or less important depending upon the emphasis. It must always, however, be considered, for neither subject nor design is experienced wholly in terms of itself. The conservative and more conventional members of the school might be represented by such writers as the late W. C. Brownell or F. J. Mather; the younger, the more emphatically liberated, by Elie Faure, Lewis Mumford and Thomas Craven. The inheritance here runs back to Winckelmann and to Ruskin, in both of whose work the insistence upon the social factors in art is blended and sometimes confused with the sharp observation

of formal characteristics. It must be seen, of course, that the range of emphasis within this group is very great for it runs from the sentimental to the austere, from "interested" humanitarianism to a disinterested and ironical statement of "esthetic" facts.

Now, however suggestive such a classification may be for the purpose of navigating among our critical currents, it will be seen upon reflection to be quite superficial. Criticism differs from esthetic speculation in more ways than one, but particularly in that taste, temperament and personal bias are given greater opportunity to prevail. Whatever the general approach and basic assumptions of the point of view, the constant preoccupation with particular objects demands quick emotional contacts which reflect in the criticism the vitality and the complexity of the critic's character. Thus, as with people themselves, classification never fits. The historians of the fourth class use in practice both impressionistic and objective analysis. Mr. Barnes believes that the subject does matter in art, and though most severely consistent in his objective analysis, has his high enthusiasms. So, Mr. Fry evidences strong romantic sympathies which often jar with his predilection for classical form, while he is as shrewd as any of the analysts in detecting the niceties of technical expression. Mr. Wright, whose *Future of Painting* is the most romantically optimistic prophecy I have yet come upon, uses, in his *Modern Painting*, both an historical method of discussion and a sharp rational analysis. Classification, therefore, upon the basis of theoretical assumptions and general approach will avail little in describing the nature of our current critical tempests. Research itself has invaded every approach to art and has tended to smother qualitative assumptions under a barrage of technical and historical information. But historical and technical learning in the arts cannot veil entirely the traditional cast of a critic's vision. Although he may not realize it, the forms, the verbal signs, which from the ages gone have been carried along, operate unfailingly, and supply for those who will look for them, possible guides among the crisscross of critical paths. A description, moreover, of critical tendencies in terms of these active traditions will

focalize the temperamental loyalties, the personal predilections which the theoretical classification left indistinct.

Among the romantic convictions carried over from the nineteenth century, the democratic devotion to art, referred to in the first chapter, is certainly the most obvious. It was fostered in the early nineteenth century by Fuseli, Haydon and others, and carried on by certain pre-raphaelites. In direct opposition to it and perhaps kept alive by a similar social psychology is Mr. Clive Bell's revival of all the aphorisms in Whistler's fusillade against democratization, industrialization, moralization, sentimentalization. Indeed, the attitude toward art which isolates it by considering most of life dull, irrelevant, humdrum, is increasingly prevalent. A third tradition, inherited from the late nineteenth century, is to be seen in Mr. W. H. Wright's enthusiasm for those half-scientists, half-artists who would extend the medium of color and are now exploiting the possibilities in light itself, abandoning the limited paper and canvas of the graphic arts for the evanescent realities of the color-organ.

One of the most striking illustrations of hybrid traditionalism is Mr. Walter Pach's attack upon what he seems to believe is a form of contemporary classicism. In his *Masters of Modern Art* he conjures up Pope's central doctrine:

"Art is but nature to advantage dressed
What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed."

but to slay this frightening shade in the following declaration:

"Only by saying that criticism of an analytical kind is a thing of recent times can we explain the prosperity of that parcel of 'half-truths,' in which 'what was thought' and 'nature' stand for the same thing, and 'to advantage dressed' may stand for anything. Dean Swift unintentionally points out the looseness of idea in the lines by giving us his still more succinct definition of style: 'Proper words in proper places.' Does any one today so much as imagine he knows which are the proper words when he sits down to write? or having written, can he hope for the agreement of more than a

tiny minority of mankind if he esteem himself so fortunate as to have found these proper words and their places?"

This hot scorn for rationalistic standards which Mr. Pach believes still exist, is further substantiated by an attack on that critic who would appreciate, in this neo-classical vein, a picture by its subject matter:

"... probably a portrait by Rubens is only the more superb because it appears to exist for no other purpose than to tell how ravishing were the eyes, the lips and the bosom of Isabella Brandt or Helena Fourment. A later age will see that a beautiful subject does not make a beautiful picture, and it will not be satisfied with the vague statement that the ideas emitted concerning the subject are what count."

By the last sentence Mr. Pach has joined Ruskin to the eighteenth century, thus assailing two traditions at one blow. Now if this essay has done anything, I hope it has made clear that the eighteenth century critic did not evaluate Rubens *entirely* for his subject matter, but that the popular mind of the nineteenth century, misinterpreting Ruskin, did tend to do so. That Mr. Pach, who is in far closer touch than most of us with opinions about art, believes that people now do see pictures for their stories, or hold with Ruskin that ideas matter, is, to say the least, proof that tradition is strong. But it is clear that an attack upon a tradition may not necessarily be untraditional. Thus, when Mr. Pach blends the eighteenth century view with a victorian and opposes an exaggeration of both with an impressionistic esprit, he is himself unconsciously following his temperamental progenitors of the late nineteenth century.

But Mr. Pach overestimates, it seems to me, the prevalence to-day of the view that subject matter is all important in art, and he completely fails to see the presence of eighteenth century classicism in the "criticism of the analytical kind" which exists. The "esthetic facts" perceived by those who now analyze sculpture in terms of its planes, color, surface meas-

urements, etc., are much more technical and accurate than those perceived by Reynolds and Flaxman, but this perception proceeds upon a similar rational concern for technical elements. Moreover, the general assumption that an analysis of the "parts" of painting would lead to an appreciation of esthetic value, so characteristic of the eighteenth century critic, is now to be seen beneath the criticism which rationally discovers and discriminates formative (or plastic) facts.

The disarming mask worn nowadays by the new "scientific" classicist, namely his conscious impartiality, is at once the feature which distinguishes him from the nineteenth century searcher for "quality" and the clue to his real ancestry. The eighteenth century Mr. Richardson, for example, cautioned his readers against accepting authority, market value and popular reputation as criteria in their judgment of pictures. He protested a bold skepticism in the very face of inspiration. "We must go step by step," says he, we must "give no assent beyond what we see evidence for." Even a connoisseur, he declares, "must consider the Ancients the Italians, Van Dyck, Annibale Carracci, Gulio Romano, Michelangelo and the divine Raffaele himself as Fallible, and examine their Works with the same Indifferency, as if he had never heard of such men." It would be difficult to find among the modern believers in critical skepticism a more robust declaration of faith; and it is quite obvious that both eighteenth and twentieth century "scientific" criticism is marked by enthusiasm for esthetic rather than antiquarian appeal.

Mr. Barnes, too, whose criticism is, in my opinion, highly spontaneous, original and objective, is not without his roots in the past. When he says that "in Raphael there is also no real color sense," he is stating a fact which both Richardson and Reynolds perceived and considered significant. Reynolds also notes a "littleness of manner" in Raphael's painting, which Mr. Barnes, if I understand him rightly, would agree to. Furthermore, Reynolds contrasts Raphael unfavorably with the venetians in his taste in color and in his management of light and shadow. Mr. Barnes, of course, expands the analysis of venetian color beyond anything Reynolds had dreamed of, and certainly differs in his preference for the venetian painting over the roman, but the fundamental separation of elements

and the direction of analysis itself is extraordinarily similar. This is also true of the remarks made not only by Mr. Barnes but by a number of modern critics. The esthetic facts found are incredibly similar when one realizes that not merely a century but a new technical learning has come between the two visions.

Now, between these two traditions: the objective vision of the eighteenth century and the personal or temperamental vision of the nineteenth, both of which were and are actively engaged in explaining "modern art," the writing of Mr. Roger Fry stands as a perfect illustration of a complex inheritance. Mr. Fry seems to me to be a child of two centuries and a little confusing for that reason. Early in his career he realized the need for a new objectivity in art criticism; but he fosters an admiration for the romance of post-impressionistic experiment, and the thrill in the exploitation of a newly discovered primitive art. In theory, Mr. Fry has inclined toward contrary poles. On the one hand, as noted by Miss Gilbert, he says that "art is capable of any degree of representation"; on the other he joins Mr. Bell in emphasizing form and separating art from the irrelevancies of every day. Thus it is not surprising to find that in his essay on Cézanne, and there is scarcely a more fascinating piece of critical analysis of painting to be found than this, he reaches a genuine anomaly.

After having shown the intensely romantic nature of the master, the lifelong search for an absolute, which is ironically phrased by Cézanne himself in a classical formula, "*L'art est une harmonie parallèle à la nature*," after having made the very most of the evident irony in the case of this romanticist who wishes to become classical, Mr. Fry concludes that he succeeded. He says:

"Cézanne counts pre-eminently as a great classic master. We may almost sum him up as the leader of the modern return to Mediterranean conceptions of art—his saying he wished 'to do Poussin again after nature' is no empty boast. Cézanne then was a classic artist, but perhaps all great Classics are made by the repression of a Romantic."

Here is a nice paradox, with enough psychological implications to stagger the most devoted modernist. But the conclusion is obviously debatable for the proof lies there in Cézanne's canvases, and the debate is clearly too long to begin in this essay. It is my suspicion, however, that Mr. Fry is decidedly resting on the dilemma of his own contradictory enthusiasms.

This suspicion is very nearly confirmed by certain passages in Mr. Fry's monograph *Flemish Art*, which is not merely illustrative of the personal case of Mr. Fry, but typical of a great many of us who are caught in the vortex of these two great and opposing traditions. For example, after pointing out the characteristics of precision, accuracy and perfect control of pigment in the work of the early flemish painters and after characterizing their vision as "everyday" vision, Mr. Fry implies his own predilection for a renaissance or italian manner:

"But this everyday vision has not been the concern of the greatest painters; they have sought to place themselves at a greater distance from the phenomena of nature to view them with a more detached eye, to be less entangled in their immediate references and implications. They have sought by that contemplative and disinterested vision to discover those more universal truths which escape the untrained vision, distorted as it is from infancy, by the needs of the practical and the instinctive life."

This recalls passage after passage from *The Discourses* of Sir Joshua in defense of the grand style.

Finally, Mr. Fry gives, it seems to me, ample grounds for the inference that he has been seduced by the grand style when further on in the same book he speaks of Rubens:

"And mark, it is not merely Rubens' alertness to new impressions and new aspects of nature but his power straight away to give these an adequate pictorial interpretation: to transmute them into the key of great style."

It will be noted that Mr. Fry has not said, "Into the key of *the* great style," or even "into the key of *a* style"; great style is here a universal or an absolute standard. But there is no real reason for defining "great style" in the limited sense in which it is defined in the quotation previous to the above. The power of a definitive tradition has, in a word, incited this conception. This is an example, though by no means the only example, of a distinguished modern dogmatism.

It will seem to many, of course, that I am pressing the case for the prevalence of tradition too far; I would certainly not wish to be understood too literally. The similarities of perception to which I refer above are not to be understood as "borrowings," and I desire in no way either to disparage the originality of the critics whose work I have used for examples, or to obscure the salient differences in taste between the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Originality in current criticism seems to me far richer than it was in the eighteenth century and more learned, penetrating and intellectually honest than it was in the nineteenth. The enlightenment which Mr. Fry himself, for example, brings to a work of art, the variety and breadth of his interests, the keenness of his eye, the imaginative suggestion of his words, embody what in my opinion the best criticism should do. Mr. Barnes' discussion of drawing and color in his immensely valuable *The Art in Painting* and his analysis of the plastic elements in specific paintings are about as perfect examples of original contributions to a theory of painting as one could wish to find anywhere. But historical erudition concerning the objects of art is lent no dignity by an indifference to the history of critical traditions themselves, for, as in Mr. Fry's case, the trenchancy of discrimination may be deflected into paradox by the contradiction of loyalties which are held unconsciously. Moreover, the inventive analysis which Mr. Barnes displays may lose much historical significance by a failure to perceive the precise novelty in the meaning and the application of terms, for terms themselves have a past.

It may be said, for example, in refutation of the belief in the prevalence of critical traditions, that although critical words remain in use, they shift their meanings, thus shattering the essence of traditional views. But to judge this, one

must of course first become familiar with the ancient usage and define the traditional attitudes for which the words are often the signs. The term color offers a nice illustration of change, for modern scientific investigation and modern practice have opened up comparatively new relationships between color and other "parts" of painting. Design, on the contrary, illustrates by its use to-day the unconscious adherence to a variety of traditions. There seems to be a supposition that it meant, in the eighteenth century, *drawing*, and nothing but drawing. This belief is exploded by the fact that Du Piles says: "The word design, as it relates to painting, is taken in three different senses," and by the fact that he, in contrast to a great many moderns, continues to define its usage to the extent of a page. Now it is obvious that Du Piles achieves a traditional dogmatism, but the modern, it is no less obvious, by his ignorance of verbal tradition, loses the edge of many a good critical contour.

Thus one is forced to believe that modern objective criticism frees itself from traditional forms only in the matter of its conclusions. The sharp disparity between the eighteenth century estimate of an artist and that of the twentieth century estimate of the same artist is, in fact, the one sign of the formation of a distinct twentieth century taste. But even here, one is appalled on the one hand by the reckless individualism of certain conclusion about art, and on the other, by the colorless universalism of many. Has modern archæology, by extending knowledge, made taste elastic, ready to accept as good, beautiful, true, the art of any period, any style, any manner, so long as it is dated and exactly defined? Or has it sharpened observation, obliterated general concepts and incited a specialist's sanguine crusade for his one period, for a single style? It is a difficult question. Perhaps the fact that the science of esthetics proceeds isolatedly within its own traditions, above the critical clichés and indifferent to the actual history of taste, fosters an indifference to tradition. This must indeed encourage both the supine tolerance of taste, called universalism, and the perverse intolerance, called individualism. But if modern criticism is to depend for its originality upon its judicial conclusions, it will attain historical insignificance. For conclusions are the least

interesting and the least valuable part of the critical experience. Only as they stimulate the motive power for further experience are they important. One plays the game for them, as in sport one plays to win, but the end of criticism lies no more in them than the good of sport does in a victory.

The conclusion, therefore, of this essay may be stated briefly, and it concerns the want on the part of modern critics of a learning fallen into disuse. No one certainly who is interested in the fine arts can but perceive the enlightenment which historical research has brought to the discussion of artworks. No one can remain incognizant nowadays of the immense educational value in the method of objective analysis, which is growing in favor. Yet few, it seems, realize that the maturity and control of criticism, the virtues which incite deliberation and insure freedom from prejudice, rest largely in a knowledge of traditions; for few realize that to regulate prejudice is first to recognize its existence, secondly to understand how traditional it is.

But this itself is an old story: the platitudinous Sir Joshua, besides trying his hand at painting took a turn down both the critical and theoretical highroads; and though his diletantism produced what moderns call superficiality, he made the following reflection:

"Some attention is surely due to what we can no more get rid of than we can get out of ourselves. We are creatures of prejudice; we neither can nor ought to eradicate it; we must only regulate it by reason; which kind of regulation is indeed little more than obliging the lesser, the local and temporary prejudices, to give way to those which are more durable and lasting."

THE END

9375

INVENTORY '80
PV

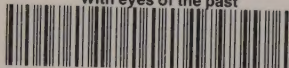
75

93

99

04

N7435.L3 1928
With eyes of the past



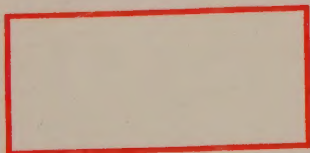
3 5065 00065 47

N 7435 .L3 1928

Ladd, Henry Andrews, 1895-
1941. c.1

With eyes of the past

DATE DUE





T2-DNJ-555

